

# MARY

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# VS. LUCIFER

*The Apparitions of Our Lady*

1531-1933

JOHN IRELAND GALLERY

THE BRUCE PUBLISHING COMPANY • MILWAUKEE

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-7346

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To MARY, OUR CAPTAIN

"Make me worthy to sing thy praises, O Sacred Virgin!  
Give me strength against thy enemies!"

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## Foreword

We are in the most crucial period of the human race. The choice is clear — Christianity or Communism, Christ or chaos. With the natural solicitude of a spiritual mother, the Queen of Heaven and earth has called this dilemma to our attention impressively, repeatedly, but to an alarming extent too many of us have ignored her.

This book may well upset you. It may lead you to arrive at a rather common current conviction, that we are witnessing the last lush years of our era.

But it may also cheer you with the realization that there is a solution to our problem — and that is to turn to the only one who can save us through her who is “our life, our sweetness and our hope.” She has done it before; she can do it again.

Suspect from the start of diabolical influence, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Communism is motivated and directed by him who supremely hates God and all that pertains to God — and that is Lucifer.

When it comes to a fight with Lucifer, God has indicated the one who can vanquish him. He announced this after the fall of man in Paradise when he said to the devil: “I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel” (Gen. 3:15). So today as Father Gallery urgently and eloquently calls to our attention, the issue is truly Mary or Lucifer. In this Marian and atomic age, this book is timely, factual, and desperately needed. Our fate may depend on how many read and heed a book like this. As Pope Pius XII said: “The human race today is involved in a supreme crisis, which will end in its salvation by Christ or its dire destruction.”

“And in those days cometh John the Baptist preaching in the desert of Judea, and saying: Do penance . . .” (Mt. 3:1, 2). In

our day comes a modern John, the Reverend John Ireland Gallery with a similar message. Much of the attractiveness of this work is its revelation of the qualities of the author, his intelligent faith, his vigor of expression, and most of all his deep and tender love of our Blessed Mother.

Everyone who shares that love will be delighted with the Marian information and inspiration in these pages, and grateful to the author for calling to our attention the choice we must make — Mary or Lucifer.

— WALTER E. CROARKIN  
*St. Agnes Church,  
Chicago Heights, Ill.*

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## MARY vs. LUCIFER

## CHAPTER I . . . *The Call to Arms*

"God has . . . set an enmity . . . between Mary and the devil." "The power of Mary over all the devils will especially shine forth in the latter times."

— ST. GRIGNON DE MONTFORT

This world of ours, standing in the weird dawn of the atomic age, is in an agonized state of frustrated confusion. It is frantically seeking the way out of this terrible situation. And there seems no way out of the maze. We of the Western world seem to be caught on the horns of a dilemma: if we arm enough for protection against Communism, we spend ourselves into bankruptcy. And still the red tide continues to creep on and on.

Our great Western world, which is fundamentally Christian, has been acting on the assumption that there is no God, or at least that He takes no active interest in what happens to His creatures. True, He created us, and then became man and died to redeem us. But now, say our master-minds in effect, He has withdrawn from this world and left mankind to its fate. When our thinking is based on such a ridiculous assumption, it is no wonder that the present world situation does not make sense, and that we have arrived at a terrible crisis.

This crisis did not come about overnight. God certainly would not have allowed us to approach the brink of destruction unless we had defied Him repeatedly and repeatedly ignored His warnings. Surely He must have used some means to plead with us to return to our Father's house. God must have left unmistakable signs to warn us that we were taking the wrong road. If we take the trouble to look, we should find these signs. And, even at this late date, there is still time to take the long road back.

Here is the theme of our whole story: God sent His mother to tell us that peace in our world is *conditional upon coming back to Him*, and unless we do return to Him all the pacts and plans in the world will not save us. Indeed, without a sincere conversion of the world, these plans will be worse than useless, for they will only increase God's anger for having ignored His express warnings: "If my words are heeded, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she will spread her errors throughout the world, promoting wars . . . various nations will be annihilated."

In 1710 a young French priest wrote: \* "It was through Mary that the salvation of the world was begun, and it is through Mary that it must be consummated. . . .

"God has never made and formed but one enmity; but it is an irreconcilable one, which shall endure and grow even to the end. It is between Mary, His worthy Mother, and the devil — between the children and servants of the Blessed Virgin, and the children and tools of Lucifer. . . . He has inspired her . . . with so much hatred against that cursed enemy of God, with so much ingenuity in unveiling the malice of that ancient serpent, with so much power to . . . crush that proud and impious rebel, that he fears her . . . in a sense . . . more than God Himself . . . because Satan, being proud, suffers infinitely more from being beaten and punished by a little and humble handmaid of God, and her humility humbles him more than the divine power. . . .

"But the power of Mary over all the devils will especially shine forth in the latter times, when Satan will lay his snares against her heel: that is to say, her . . . poor children, whom she will raise up to make war against him."

Peter the Hermit preached the first crusade; St. Bernard of Clairvaux, one of the three greatest troubadours of our Lady, preached the second; and our Lady herself came to preach the ninth. And she doesn't say, as Bernard and Peter did, "Grasp your sword and to horse!" but "*Take your beads and to your knees!*"

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\* St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary* (New York: Montfort Publications, 1954), pars. 52, 54.

## CHAPTER II . . . Guadalupe

"He has not done thus for any other nation."

— Ps. 147

As the setting sun shoulders its way around the world, one group of priests and nuns after another takes up the vesper song of the Divine Office. Like all the rest of the Office, Vespers are made up of psalms, readings from other parts of Scripture, and ancient hymns almost as old in the Church as holy Scripture itself. In the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin this lesson is read:

"From the beginning, and before the world, was I created,  
And unto the world I shall not cease to be,  
And in the holy dwelling place I have ministered before  
him" (Eccl. 24:14).

This is applied to our Lady because of her prominent place in the mind of God before creation. It is hard for us mortals to use a time schedule when speaking of God, because He dwells in eternity. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years are as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8).

The coming of the Virgin to Mexico was heralded by at least a thousand years.

Our story takes us back to Constantinople in the time of the Emperor Justinian. "New Rome" was the capital of the world. Old Rome had fallen in 476. It had been sacked and burned four times. The monk Gregory, a deacon of Rome (later to become Pope St. Gregory the Great), was Papal Legate to the imperial court in Constantinople. While there, Gregory became friends with St. Leandro, a Spaniard. When St. Leandro became archbishop of Seville, and after the year 590 when Gregory was elected pope, the pontiff sent a precious image of the Virgin which he had in

his private oratory to St. Leandro. It was brought by St. Isidore — St. Leandro's young brother — to encourage the bishop of Seville in his work, just as the great bishop of Rome was working in war-torn Italy. The statue was venerated for centuries in a chapel in ancient Hispalis (Seville).

When the Moors conquered Andalusia in 711, some Christians took the precious image and hid it in the mountains to the north in Estremadura. It lay hidden until the reconquest of Spain. According to tradition, a cowherder named Gil, from Caceres, was searching for one of his cows in the mountains around the Guadalupe River. After he had found the cow, a beautiful woman appeared to him and said, *"Do not be afraid, I am the Virgin Mother of God."* Then she directed him to call the priests and have them dig in the spot where she appeared. When they did, they found the ancient statue safely secured in a stout casket. Gil, on the other hand, when he arrived home found that his son had died. After some days of mourning, when the clergy came to take the body away to the grave, he suddenly sat up alive and well.

At first a hermitage was erected on the spot where the image was found. As the years passed, more and more men came to spend their lives in prayer at that hallowed spot. Kings, nobles, and people of Spain showered their riches on the monastery in magnificent gestures that only Spaniards can make. The Jeronymite monks took over the monastery in 1387 at the request of King Don Juan I under the title of "Our Lady of Guadalupe" (Moorish for "Hidden River"). Like the shrine of Our Lady of the Pillar in Zaragoza, our Lady's shrine at Guadalupe was spared the diabolically wanton destruction of the late civil war.

The connection between the old and the new world shrine stems from Cortez and his men. The conqueror of the mighty empire of the Aztecs was born in Medellin, Estremadura, in 1445. Because the monastery of Guadalupe was near his home, and belonged to his own state, he had even more devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe than ordinary Spaniards. After he had captured the wealth of Montezuma, he sent a precious lamp "of incalculable value" to the shrine. He also had a golden scorpion made which

he sent as an ex-voto offering\* in thanksgiving for his deliverance from sickness or death after having been bitten by a scorpion on one of his expeditions in Mexico. Immediately after he was bitten, he called on Our Lady of Guadalupe for protection, and was saved from ill effects. Most of the men in Cortez' army, and most of the Spaniards living in Mexico in 1531 were from the neighborhood of the monastery of Guadalupe.

When the Spaniards came to the New World, they raped and robbed and murdered. The conquistadores stole other men's wives, practiced concubinage, blasphemed, and broke every commandment of God and the Church except one — the First Commandment of God. In spite of all their vices and shortcomings, the soldiers kept the faith and hoped eventually to die in the arms of the Church. Their crimes were not due to a denial of God and His law, but to their violent passions. Their discoveries were named after the most beautiful things they knew — the things of the kingdom of heaven: Santiago, San Salvador, Espiritu Santo Bay. A travelogue on Latin America reads like the litany of the saints.

While the clash of arms between the old world and the new was going on, a battle of words had been raging for four centuries between certain theologians. It was fought in the realm of abstract thought, involving the time and the manner in which our Lady was freed from original sin. The battles were mostly individual encounters by single champions — the Church in general had been celebrating the feast of the "Conception of Mary" (now called the "Immaculate Conception") since very early times.

The Spanish and Portuguese especially vowed to confess, and defend with their lives if necessary, that Mary was conceived without any stain of original sin. King Joao IV of Portugal on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1646, published such a decree and all members of the National University of Coimbra joined in such an oath. The Spanish universities did the same. We see how Spaniards generally felt about it when the first land after San Salvador (Holy Redeemer) itself was named "Santa

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\* Offerings of thanksgiving for favors received.

Maria de la Concepcion" ("Saint Mary of the Conception").

On Saturday, December 9, 1531, in the Church of St. James in Mexico City, the Franciscans were to celebrate for the first time a grand fiesta in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Their brother Don Fray Juan de Zumarraga had just been named bishop of Mexico and the parish of the friars in Tlaltelolco was going to celebrate the victory of our Lady over Satan with all possible solemnity. The stage was now set for the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Juan Diego was a poor Indian of the village of Cuatitlan some nine miles north of the city. He and his wife Maria Luisa and his uncle Bernardino lived simple, Christian lives like the other lower-class natives who had embraced the faith. Shortly after midnight on the morning of December 9 he walked to the church of his baptism, to attend the Mass of Our Lady's Conception, and listen to the instructions and take part in the fiesta.

On the northern outskirts of the now great city (1950 pop. 2,234,795) of Mexico, six miles from the center of the capital stands the small hill of Tepeyac. For centuries it was sacred to Tonantzin, the mother of the gods. An altar was erected before the temple on the hilltop on which a man or woman would be stretched and offered as human sacrifice. After the removal of the still beating heart of the victim, his body would then be thrown downhill to the assembled worshipers, who would devour the flesh and drink the blood.

From here it would be best to let the Oratorian Father Tanco tell the story. He had at his disposal the best traditions and manuscripts. Unfortunately we miss the diffuse simplicity and enthusiasm of the original Nahuatl dialect of the Indians, and even much of the grace of the Spanish translation is lost when it is again turned into English.

"...Toward the hilltop and the rocky pinnacle which overhangs the plain on the lake-side, the Indian heard a canticle resounding sweetly, which, as he said, seemed to him like the warbling of many different birds that sang together in dulcet harmony and choired to one another in wonderful accord. The higher hills behind repeated and multiplied the echoes.

"Lifting his eyes to the place whence he thought the canticle proceeded, he saw a white shining cloud, having around it a magnificent rainbow whose colors were formed by rays of most dazzling light that blazed from a central point. Absorbed and almost ravished out of himself, but otherwise calm and untroubled, the Indian felt in his heart an inexpressible joy and jubilation. So he asked himself, 'What must this be that I hear and see? Or whither have I been carried? Can it be that I have been transplanted to the heaven of delights which our ancestors called the origin of our flesh, the garden of flowers, the earthly paradise hidden from the eyes of men?'

"While he was in this rapturous wonder the canticle ceased, and he heard himself called by name, in a woman's sweet, gentle tones. The voice came from the brightness of the cloud, and bade him draw near. Advancing and hastening up the ridge he saw in the midst of the refulgence a most beautiful Lady — very like her whom we now see in the blessed Picture, and well represented in the description which the Indian gave before the Picture was produced or copied. Her apparel, as he described it, shone so that, struck by its splendors, the rocks on that rough summit looked like well-cut, transparent precious stones; while the leaves of the cactus and the bramble — which the exposed situation makes poor and stunted — seemed to be clusters of fine emeralds, with thorns, branches and trunks of bright, burnished gold, and the very soil of the little tableland was as jasper of many colors.

"With an affable, encouraging look, the Lady spoke to the Indian, in his own language:

*"My son, Juan Diego, whom I tenderly love as a little one and weak, whither goest thou?"\**

"The Indian replied, 'I am going, most noble Mistress and Lady mine, to Mexico, to the Tlaltelolco ward to hear Mass which the ministers and substitutes of God show us.'

\* Carillo y Perez points out, "These expressive words which in our (Spanish) idiom may seem unsuited to the majesty of the Most Holy Virgin, are not so in the Mexican in which the Lady spoke. They form the most appropriate locution in that tongue which conveys the most reverence when it is most naïve, most affable and caressing." *Pensil Americano*, 1793.

*"Having heard him, Our Blessed Lady continued: 'Know, my son, my very beloved, that I am the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God Who is the Author of life, the Creator of all things, the Lord of heaven and earth, present everywhere. And it is my wish that here there be raised to me a temple in which, as a loving Mother to thee and to those like thee, I shall show my tender clemency and the compassion I feel for those who love and seek me, and for all who implore my protection, who call on me in their labors and afflictions; and in which I shall hear their weeping and their supplications that I may give them consolation and relief. That my will may have its effect, thou must go to the city of Mexico and to the palace of the bishop who resides there, to tell him that I have sent thee and that I wish a temple to be raised to me in this place. Thou shalt report what thou hast seen and heard; and be assured that I will repay what thou doest for me in the charge I give thee: for it I will make thee great and renowned. Now thou hast heard, son, my wish. Go in peace, remembering that I shall reward thy labor and diligence; in this, therefore, employ all the strength thou art able.'*

"Prostrating himself, the Indian replied: 'I go, I go, most noble Lady and Mistress mine, to do as a humble servant, what you have ordered. Fare-you-well.'

"Departing with profound reverence the Indian descended the western shoulder of the hill and took the road to the Capital. In fulfillment of his promise he went straight to the city, the distance being three miles, and entered the palace of the Prelate, who was the Illustrious Don Fray Juan de Zumarraga, first Bishop of Mexico. Having gone in he began to ask the servants to tell the Lord Bishop that he wanted to see and speak to him. They did not do so immediately, either because it was so early, or because the Indian was poor and humble. They kept him waiting long; but finally, moved by his patience, they ushered him in.

"When he reached the presence of his Lordship, he fell on his knees and delivered his message. He said that the Mother of God had sent him; that he had seen her and spoken to her

that very morning. He then reported all that he saw and heard, just as we have related it.

"The Bishop heard with astonishment what the Indian affirmed, and marvelled at the strange occurrence; but of the message, to which he gave little credit, he seemed to make slight account, thinking it was mere imagination on the Indian's part, or nothing better than a dream. Perhaps, too, he feared it might be a delusion of the demon, as the natives were but lately converted to our holy religion. Though, therefore, he questioned the man closely on his story and found all his answers consistent, he nevertheless sent him away, promising to hear him more at length and to consider the affair more thoroughly if he came again after some days. It is evident that he wanted time to deliberate and to get information about the character of the envoy.

"The Indian was very sad and disconsolate as he left the bishop's palace, both because he saw that he was not believed and because the will of Our Blessed Lady who had sent him was not to be accomplished.

#### SECOND APPARITION

"The evening of that same day, about sunset, Juan Diego was returning to his village, which, as far as it can be traced, was Tolpetlac, situated below the slope of the higher hill, about three miles away. Tolpetlac means the "place of cat's-tail-mats," for at that time the only occupation of the villagers was to make mats of that plant. Passing, therefore, by the height on which he had that morning seen and spoken to the Virgin Mary, he found her waiting to get the answer to her message. As soon as he saw her he prostrated himself before her and cried out: —

"'O little one, most dear (a Mexican address of affection to a superior) my Queen and most high Lady, I did what you told me. Though for a long time I was not let in to the bishop, I finally saw him and gave him your message just as you ordered me. He listened to me with kindness and attention; but from

what I noticed in him and from his questions, I gathered that he did not believe me for he told me to come again that he might at leisure inquire into my affair, and examine it more closely. He supposed that the temple you demand was an imagination or whim of mine and not your will. I therefore beg of you to send some noble and influential person, some one worthy of respect, to whom credit ought to be given; for you see, O my Sovereign, that I am a poor serf, a mere lowly peasant, and that I am not fit for this embassy of yours.

“Pardon, O Queen, my boldness, if I have at all failed in the respect due to your greatness. Far be it from me to incur your indignation, or to displease you by my reply.”\*

“Our Blessed Lady heard the words of the Indian benignly, and then said: —

“*Hear, much loved son, and understand that I am not without clients and servants to send, for I have many that I might employ if I wished, many that would do whatever they were ordered; but it much befits that thou undertake this affair and conduct it. My wish and desire has to be accomplished by thy means. So I ask thee, my son, and I order thee, to go back in the morning, and see and speak to the bishop. Tell him to erect for me the temple I demand, and say that she who sent thee is the Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God.*”

“Juan Diego answered: ‘Be not offended, Queen and Lady mine, at what I said. For I shall go with great good will, and obey your order with all my heart. I’ll bear your message, for I am not offering excuses, nor do I think the journey any trouble. Perhaps, indeed, I shall not be received nor willingly heard; or if the bishop listens to me he may not believe me; but all the same I will do as you tell me. And here, Lady, in this spot, I shall be waiting tomorrow evening at sunset to give you the answer that I shall have received. So peace be with you, my little one most high, and may God keep you.’

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\* “This Colloquy, is found as here reported in the historical writings of the natives, and contains nothing of mine but the translation, phrase by phrase, from the Mexican idiom to the Castilian” (Father Tanco).

"The Indian took his leave with profound humility and went to his home village. It is not known whether he mentioned the occurrence to his wife or any one else, for history says nothing on that point. Perhaps being confused and ashamed that he had not been believed, he did not dare to speak till he saw how things would turn.

"The following day, Sunday, December 10th, Juan went to Church of St. James to hear Mass and assist at the Christian Doctrine. And when the Ministers of the Gospel had as usual gone through the whole list of the native Christians of the parish, ward by ward, he went again to the bishop's palace to fulfill the mandate of the Virgin Mary. The members of the household were very slow to announce his arrival; but when he was let in, humbling himself in the bishop's presence, he told, with tears and sighs, 'how he had again seen, in the same place, the Mother of God who awaited him for the answer to her message; how she had ordered him to come back to the bishop and tell him to have a temple erected to her where she had appeared and spoken; and how she certified that she who sent him was the Mother of Jesus Christ, the ever Virgin Mary.'

"The bishop listened with greater attention this time and was disinclined to believe. But to make more sure of the facts, he questioned and requestioned the Indian, warning him to take good care what he asserted. He made him describe the Lady who sent him; and from the description he had to recognize that the man had neither been dreaming nor inventing. Nevertheless, to acquire greater certainty, and to avoid the apparent levity of believing an Indian peasant's simple tale, he told Juan that 'his story was not enough to start such an enterprise as he proposed; and that, therefore, he should tell the Lady who sent him to give him some signs by which it might be known that the message was really from the Mother of God, and that it was indeed she who wished the temple erected.'

"The Indian replied 'that the bishop might say what sign he preferred, and that he would ask it.'

"The prelate noticed that the man neither doubted nor hesi-

tated about asking the sign, but that utterly unruffled he had said to name any sign desired. He then called the two most trusted persons of his household and, in the Castilian tongue which was unintelligible to the Indian, made them look closely at the man and be ready to follow him as soon as he left the house. He directed them not to lose sight of him, but without his notice to keep after him till he reached the place where he said he had seen the Virgin Mary. They were to observe with whom he spoke, and bring back an account, of all they saw and heard.

"They did as they were ordered. When the Indian was dismissed from the bishop's presence, they followed him and, without his knowledge, kept their eyes on him.

"But as soon as Juan Diego reached the bridge on the eastern side of the city, where a stream passes and, almost at the foot of the hillock, runs into the lake, he vanished from their sight. They eagerly sought for him, and searched both sides of the hill, but all in vain. Indignant with him, therefore, they called him an impostor and liar or else a wizard. So when they came back and gave their account to the bishop they besought him not to believe this fellow, but if he returned to punish him for his imposture.

### THIRD APPARITION

"When Juan, who had gone on in advance but yet within sight of the bishop's servants, reached the summit of the hillock, he found Our Blessed Lady again waiting to get the answer to her message. Humbling himself in her presence he related 'how, in fulfillment of her order he had returned to the bishop's palace and delivered her message; how he had been questioned and requestioned, and finally told that his simple story was not enough to decide so important an affair, but that he must ask the Lady for a sure sign; 'in order,' he added, 'that it may be known that it is you who sent me, and that it is you who wish a temple to be here erected to you.'

"With tender words Our Blessed Lady thanked him for his care

and diligence and bade him come there next day that she might give him a sure sign by which the bishop would believe him. Promising obedience, the Indian reverently took his leave.

"However, the next day, Monday, the 11th of December, passed without Juan's being able to return as he had been told. For when he reached his village he found his uncle Juan Bernardino, who was as a father to him and whom he loved most deeply, sick unto death of a malignant fever which the natives call cocoliztli. Having much compassion for him he spent most of the day seeking the help of a relative of his, a medical man; who, indeed, came and administered some medicines, but with no better result than an increase of the malady. Hence the sufferer, feeling himself failing that night, besought his nephew to set out before daybreak for the Convent of St. James at Tlaltelolco and call a priest to give him the sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction, as he judged his sickness mortal.

"Juan Diego was away before dawn, hurrying with all speed to call one of the priests and return with him as guide. Therefore, toward daybreak, on Tuesday the 12th of December, he came to the place where he should cross, from the east summit of the hill. It then occurred to him that he had not come back the preceding day in obedience to the order of the Virgin Mary, as he had promised. Thinking, therefore, that if he passed the place in which he had seen her, she would reproach him for not coming as she told him, he imagined in his simplicity that by taking another path around the lower slope of the hill he should escape being seen or detained by her. This he did, saying to himself that his present business required haste, and that once free of it he could come to ask the sign and take it to the bishop. But when he had passed the spot where the spring of aluminous water rises, and was about to turn the shoulder of the hill, Our Blessed Lady came forth to meet him.

#### FOURTH APPARITION

"The Indian saw her descend to cross his way, from the sum-

mit of the hill, surrounded by a white cloud, with the same brightness as on the first occasion.

"She said to him: *'Whither goest thou, my son, and what road is this thou hast taken?'*

"My little one most beloved, and Lady mine, may God keep you! . . . How early you are around! . . . I trust you are well. . . . Be not displeased with what I shall say. Know, my sovereign, that a servant of yours, my uncle, is dangerously sick of a grievous and mortal malady. And as he appears very low I am hurrying to the city, to the church of Tlaltelolco, to call a priest who will come to confess and anoint him — for indeed we are all born subject to death. But having despatched this affair I shall return here to obey your orders. Pardon me, I beseech you, my Lady, and have patience a little; for I am not seeking an excuse not to do what you commanded this servant of yours, nor is it a false pretext I give you — tomorrow I'll come without fail."

"With a gentle look Our Blessed Lady heard the apology of the Indian, and thus replied:

*"Hear, my son, what I now say to thee: let nothing trouble or afflict thee. Fear neither pain nor sickness nor other grievous accident. Am I not here, I who am thy Mother? Thou art beneath my shadow and protection. And am I not life and health? In my lap art thou, and counted as mine. What more dost thou need? Have neither sorrow nor anxiety on account of thy uncle's sickness, for he will not die of this attack. Be even assured that he is already well."*\*

"When Juan Diego heard these words he was so much consoled and so fully satisfied that he cried out: 'Send me, then, O my Lady, to see the bishop; and give me the sign, as you said you would, that I may be believed.'

"Our Blessed Lady replied: *'Go up, my son, much loved and cherished, to the summit of the hill where you saw me and spoke to me, and pluck the roses which you will find there. Gather them*

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\* "And so it was," Father Tanco incidentally adds, "as was afterwards known, and as we shall relate farther on." *Felicidad de Mexico*, p. 18.

*in the lap of your cloak and bring them in my presence, and I shall tell you what to do and say.'*

"The Indian obeyed without a word, though he knew for certain that there were no flowers in the place; for it was barren rock and produced nothing. Having reached the top he saw there a beautiful rose-tree with fresh, odorous, dewy flowers. Arranging his cloak, or tilma, in the native fashion, he plucked as many roses as he could put into the lap of it and bore them to the presence of the Virgin Mary. She was waiting for him at the foot of a tree which the Indians call cuauzahuatl, that is, 'the tree of the spider's web' or 'the fasting tree.' It is a wild tree that produces no fruit, but in its season gives some white blossoms. From the position I think it is the ancient trunk which still stands on the slope of the hill, and at whose foot is the path leading up the eastern bank. In front of it is the aluminous spring.

"Here, doubtless, was effected the miraculous painting of the blessed Picture. For when the Indian humbled himself in the presence of the Virgin Mary and showed her the roses he had gathered, holding them up in his cloak, Our Lady herself took them out all together and put them back in the lap of the garment, saying:

*"Here thou hast the sign to take to the bishop. Tell him that by token of these roses he is to do what I ordered. Attend, son, to what I say, and remark that I place confidence in thee. Neither show what thou carriest to any one by the way, nor open thy cloak till thou art in the presence of the bishop. Then tell him what I have said, and thou wilt dispose him to raise my temple."*

"Having so spoken the Virgin Mary sent him away. The Indian was delighted with the sign, for he understood that he should now succeed and that his embassy should have effect. So he brought the roses with great care, never losing one, but snatching a glimpse of them from time to time and enjoying their fragrance and beauty.

## APPARITION OF THE PICTURE

"Juan Diego reached the episcopal palace with his latest message and asked several of the servants to tell the bishop. They did not do so till they were tired of his importunities; but noticing that he carried something in his cloak they wanted to see what it was. Though he resisted all he could, they discovered by a slight opening what he carried. Seeing all roses so beautiful, they then tried to take some of them; but when they put in their hands, as they did three times, it seemed to them that the flowers were not real but skillfully painted or woven into the cloak. They reported this to the bishop, and the Indian was led in.

"He delivered his message, saying that he brought the sign which he had been ordered to ask from the Lady who sent him. As he then unfolded his cloak the roses fell out of it to the ground, and on it there was seen painted the Picture of Our Blessed Lady as it is seen today.

"The bishop was struck with wonder at the prodigy of the fresh, odorous, dewy roses, just recently gathered, as it was the most rigorous winter time of this climate; but much more was he in admiration at the sight of the holy Picture which he and those present of his household venerated as something heavenly.

"He undid the knot from behind the Indian's head and carried the cloak to his oratory. There, fittingly placing the Picture, he gave thanks to our Lord and His glorious Mother.

"That day the bishop was kind to Juan Diego and kept him in his palace. On the following morning he bade him come and show him where the Most Holy Virgin Mary had ordered her temple to be built. When they reached the place, Juan pointed out the location and the spots in which he had the four times seen the Mother of God and spoken with her. He then asked to leave to go see his uncle, Juan Bernardino, whom he had left so sick. The bishop allowed him and sent with him some of his household, telling them that if they found the uncle cured they should conduct the man to his presence.

## FIFTH APPARITION

"When Juan Bernardino saw his nephew arrive at his house, accompanied by Spaniards and honored by them, he asked the cause of the unusual proceeding. The nephew then gave an account of his having been sent to the bishop, and of the Most Holy Virgin's assuring him that his uncle was cured. Whereupon, Juan Bernardino, having asked at what hour and minute he was said to be cured, affirmed that at that very point of time he saw the same Lady, exactly as described, and was by her restored to perfect health. She likewise told him 'that she wished a temple raised to her at the place in which she had appeared to his nephew; and moreover that her Picture was to be called OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE.' For this no reason was given.

"The servants heard all and then led the two Indians back to the presence of the bishop who examined the elder man on his sickness, on the manner of his cure, and on the appearance of the Lady who restored his health. The truth being made manifest, he took the uncle and nephew to his palace in the city of Mexico.

"Already the fame of the Miracle had spread abroad, so that the inhabitants of the city were crowding to the episcopal residence to venerate the Picture. It was therefore taken to the principal church and placed on the altar by the bishop, that the people who were coming in great numbers might all enjoy it. There it remained till, on the spot indicated by the Indian, there was built a hermitage to which it was transferred in procession with most solemn festivity.

"This," says the historian, "is the whole simple tradition, without ornament of words."\*

Fr. George Lee, C.S.Sp., in his book *Our Lady of Guadalupe* adds: That "the narrative little needed ornament of words most readers will feel. There is about it a wonderful fitness and truthfulness, as it has convinced and charmed multitudes in the past."

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\* *Ibid.*, p. 23.

The effect of our Lady's visit was truly miraculous. The Indians danced and sang and shouted, "The Most Clean Virgin One of Us." "The Mother of God Is Our Mother." No longer did the sullen followers of Montezuma look upon the God of the Spaniards as a foreign devil. The Mother of God was their own mother, and her Son was their God as well as their Brother. Thousands were baptized. What is more, real Christian life became the rule rather than the exception. Until 1531 nearly every Indian who could afford it had two or more wives. Both because of their moral promiscuity and because wives were an asset, like horses or cattle, the leaders of the Indians had mostly refused to become Christians. Now all that was changed. "The Most Clean Virgin" was one of them. She proclaimed herself their mother. Thrilled with delight at their new-found dignity as children of God and brothers of Christ, they realized that to please their heavenly Virgin-mother they had to emulate her purity. Continence became a mark of manhood rather than its opposite. Whereas previously the missionaries would consent to marry only young men who lived on monastic lands, because other marriages did not last, now the people generally began living good Christian married lives.

Only the mass conversions immediately following the first Pentecost, or the present growth of the Church in Africa can be compared to the miracle of grace wrought by Our Lady of Guadalupe. The mere physical labor of baptizing became a problem. Father Toribio in his "Indian History" says "another priest and myself baptized in five days, at the convent of Quecholac, fourteen thousand two hundred odd souls. We even imposed the Oil of the Catechumens and the Holy Chrism on all of them\* — an undertaking of no mean labor." It is an unquestionable fact that in seven years following our Lady's visit to Tepeyac, over eight million Indians were baptized among the principal races of the Aztec empire of Anahuac. And this whole nation was converted in seven short years by simple missionaries who did not work

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\* Confirmed them, according to the custom of Mexican missionaries.

great miracles as did our Lord and His Apostles. "The cross . . . was confided to the feeble hands of this young Lady, so that she could carry it in triumph to all the earth, plant it and retire then to her rocky home dominating the ancient Tenochtitlan from which she reigns over the whole new world and watches over the faith; because she . . . who has been proclaimed Queen, conserves faithfully the deposit of that faith which saves the world."†

Although the walls of the buildings surrounding the basilica at Guadalupe are filled with testimonies of miraculous cures and other favors, the outstanding fact is the tilma of Juan Diego which is a standing miracle. The Indian's cloak was of the coarsest material, poorly woven, which usually disintegrates in ten or fifteen years. The Painters' Commission, appointed during the canonical investigation of 1666, certified "that it is impossible, humanly, for any artificer to paint or produce anything so excellent on a cloth so coarse as is the tilma or ayate on which appears this Divine Picture." Painters, after complete study with the most modern equipment have still been unable to identify the coloring used. Through the centuries misguided painters have added little pictures around the edges of the painting. Their colors faded, but the job done in heaven's paint shop is as fresh today as in 1531.

The Valley of Anahuac is about the worst place to preserve any fragile material. Alternately a dank swamp and a dusty desert, the winds sweep across the plateau. The corrosive vapors of the lakes and marshes eat into everything. Ornamental works, even stone and cement, crumble in the bitter atmosphere. Colors fade almost with the sunset. But the tilma in which Mary arranged the roses with her own hands remains with her image in all its original freshness and delicate color.\* Even the most modern color photographs of the picture are mere crude copies.

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† Pius XII in a radio address to all the Americas, Oct. 12, 1945.

\* Even the well-wrought and magnificent cloaks of Montezuma's palace and the strong skins used for maps and charts, though carefully kept in airtight containers, have hardly left a few fragments hanging together.

The picture was not put under glass until 1647. During those one hundred and sixteen years people rubbed it with all sorts of objects. Men touched it with their swords on the way to battle. People fell on it and embraced it. Even after being covered, the glass was removed yearly and thousands of different objects touched it. Nitric acid used to clean the solid gold and silver frame was accidentally spilled on the painting. Instead of eating it away, it simply left a mark on the cloth, like an ex-voto to its miraculous preservation.

A sneak once planted a time bomb hidden in a candle within two feet of the picture. The explosion twisted the wrought-iron candlestick like a pretzel. But the glass of the picture was not even cracked.

The heat and smoke of candles, of incense and other burnt perfumes, the misguided zeal of the devout and the malice of the wicked have only enhanced Mary's glory.

When all this was placed before Pope Benedict XIV in 1754, he fell on his knees before the replica of the painting and exclaimed, "Non fecit taliter ulli alteri nationi" — "He hath not done thus for any other nation" (Ps. 147). He approved the Mass and Office of Our Lady of Guadalupe, setting the feast on the anniversary of Mary's gift of her picture: December 12.

Our Lady used no stern language in speaking to her poor children who had been steeped in the gory, carnal horrors of paganism. She did not warn them of dire punishments that would follow if her message remained unheeded, as she did three centuries later at Rue du Bac and La Salette and at Fatima. The poor children who dwelt "in the valley of the shadow of death" had been living in terror long enough. Like all primitive pagan worship, the main purpose of their rites was to appease angry demons rather than express love and reverence for the Supreme Being. The Indians needed love and kindness. They needed to realize that they had dignity as men because they were children of God, and they were not miserable victims of cruel and capricious minor gods. When the Mother of God came and told them that she was also

their own mother, she got that message across in a way that nothing else could.

The Indians remained faithful to their Mother through all the stormy years that followed. Even at the height of the persecutions, when priests and sisters and faithful were butchered, the anti-Catholic governments of Mexico never dared to close the shrine of Guadalupe. Today the home of the patroness of America shines out in ever brighter glory.

In 1531 the bishop of Mexico included in his diocese the whole of North America — we belong to Guadalupe and Guadalupe belongs to us.

## CHAPTER III . . . *Our Lady of the Willow*, 1649

"Tell the people not to neglect the source of graces  
that God has made available to them."

— OUR LADY TO PIERRE PORT-COMBET,  
Veney, France, 1649

Nowhere are there so many or such famous shrines of our Lady as in France. Lourdes was only the latest recognized visit of our Lady to a land that could almost be called her second home. As a matter of fact, the French claim to be the first people in the world to give public honor to Mary. They claim to have venerated her long before she was born! Chartres, we learn from Julius Caesar, was the chief seat of worship for the Druids in Gaul. According to the tradition, the Druids had an altar erected *Virgini Pariturae* ("To the Virgin about to give birth"), and some authorities hold that sacrifice was offered in that place *Matri futurae Dei nascituri* ("To the future mother of the God about to be born").

We know that central France was evangelized probably by immediate disciples of St. John the Apostle, with whom our Lady spent the last years of her life. And it is generally agreed by scholars that the great cathedral of Chartres was erected over a grotto of Druidic worship. Chartres also treasures the only major relic of our Lady claimed in the world. According to tradition, Empress Irene of Constantinople gave Charlemagne the veil of our Lady which had been carefully preserved in Constantinople for centuries before. In 876 Charles the Bald brought it from Aachen to Chartres. Apparently no sound scholar can either substantiate or disprove these traditions. As Macaulay says, they "are lost in the twilight of fable."

It would be safe to say that the first visit of our Lady in her

present campaign against her age-old enemy the devil took place in 1649 in the tiny hamlet of Plantees, in the Isere Valley, a tributary of the Rhone. This valley had become a stronghold of Calvinism, that gloomy heresy that "sought to merit heaven by making earth a hell." Here, in 1604, was born Pierre Port-Combet. Although he married a devout Catholic, he, as a fanatical Protestant, insisted on bringing up their six children as Protestants. He lost no opportunity to show his hatred of all things Catholic, especially anything connected with our Lady. So, on the feast of the Annunciation in 1649, a great holyday of our Lady in that country, Pierre ostentatiously went to work although it was a public holiday. He started to prune some willow trees beside the road, so that those going to Mass would see how he despised the feast day.

At the first stroke of the knife, the willows began to bleed. It was not merely a slow ooze of reddish sap, but a large gush of blood. At first he thought he had cut himself, but he found he had not. He cut the tree again, and more blood gushed forth. His wife came by, probably on her way to church. Seeing him covered with blood, she feared he had cut himself badly. She, of course, could not understand his story, so she took the knife and cut another branch. But no blood came. Now completely bewildered, Pierre cut another branch. More blood than ever gushed forth. Another neighbor came by, Louis Caillet. He too took the knife but drew no blood.

The whole community soon learned what had happened, and agreed that it was God's warning to Pierre for ignoring the laws of the Church. Because he had broken the laws of the state, he was taken to court and fined. The records may still be found in the Provincial Archives at Grenoble.

In those early days it was not customary for the Church authorities to have a formal investigation of such things, but fortunately for us a commission was appointed to inquire into the supernatural character of the event. Their decision, which is still a matter of record, was that this was indeed a serious warning from God to Port-Combet.

He was seen kneeling often by the tree praying to God, and he probably would have joined the Church but for the threats of violence from his fellow Protestants. His wife and her friends prayed unceasingly to our Lady for his conversion.

It was again in March, seven years later, that our Lady herself intervened. Pierre was again working in the fields. He noticed a lady dressed in white with a blue mantle, her face partly covered with a black veil, apparently lost, coming toward him. Pierre turned his plow in the opposite direction, but almost instantly, it seemed, she caught up with him.

"God be with you, my friend," she said. He perceived that she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. "What is being done about this devotion?" she asked. "Do many people come?"

Although the question might have needed some explanation, Pierre answered, "Good day, Madame. Quite enough people come here for that."

"And are there any miracles?" the lady asked.

"Oh, some miracles!" Feeling very uncomfortable about it all, Pierre goaded his oxen and pulled away.

Raising her voice, the lady ordered, "Stop your oxen! Where does that Huguenot live who cut the willow tree? Does he not want to be converted?"

"I don't know," answered Pierre. "He lives somewhere over there."

Then the lady exclaimed, "Wretch! Do you think I do not know that you are the Huguenot?"

More startled than ever, Pierre again tried to break off the interview. Seeing that he was preparing to move off again, the lady said, "If you do not stop your oxen, I will!"

Realizing that he was in the presence of someone far greater than himself, Pierre answered, "I can stop them very well myself, Madame." And he suited the action to the words.

Then our Lady gave him her final warning. *"Realize that your end is at hand. If you do not return to the true religion you will become one of the biggest firebrands in hell. But if you do change your religion, I shall protect you before God. Tell the people to*

*pray to advantage, not to neglect the source of graces which God in His mercy has made available to them."*

In a frenzy, almost beside himself, Pierre goaded his beasts. But suddenly he realized his rudeness and turned to beg pardon of the Lady.

She had gone. She was on her way back to the thorn hill where he had first seen her. Running after her, he begged her pardon and asked her to listen to him. Apparently heedless of his entreaties, she continued her swift walk.

Finally, moved by the tears of the poor, penitent man, she stopped and turned. Just as he reached her, he saw her raised several yards in the air and then fade away. (Maximin and Melanie were to see her leave them in the same way at La Salette, nearby, two hundred years later.)

Pierre fell on his knees at the spot and determined to embrace the faith and do penance for his sins.

An hour later his wife came looking for him. Some shepherds told her they heard him talking to someone, but could see no one. And later they saw him running after an invisible being and asking the person to stop.

Although he feared that his Protestant friends would now wreak the violence they had so often threatened, he found to his amazement that they too had suddenly received the grace of conversion. They asked him to lead the way into the Church.

On the eve of the Assumption, 1656, Pierre was stricken with a fever. Realizing his end was near, he asked for the priest. The Augustinian Prior at Vinay received him into the Church, and on the next day, August 15, he made his First Holy Communion. Five weeks later, Pierre Port-Combet died. At his own request, he was buried at the foot of the miraculous willow tree.

His six children, and many other Protestants, were converted. From that day Calvinism began to recede from the valley.

Almost immediately people came to visit the "tree beloved of Mary" as they called it. Soon a chapel was built on the spot where our Lady had spoken to Pierre. It was called "Notre Dame de Bon-Recontre" ("Our Lady of Good Meeting"). Soon it became too

small and was replaced by a larger one under the title of "Notre Dame de l'Osier" ("Our Lady of the Willow Tree"). This chapel sufficed until the revolutionists came in 1793 from Grenoble. They plundered and desecrated the sanctuary and smashed everything they could.

Finally the red tide ebbed. In 1830, the bishop of Grenoble again sent priests to take care of the ancient shrine.

In 1856, the second centenary of the apparition, Pope Pius IX decreed a Solemn Jubilee for our Lady's birthday, September 8. A new church was built, and in 1873, by decree of Pius IX, the statue of Our Lady of the Willow was solemnly crowned. The crown had been consecrated in Rome by the Holy Father himself.

Again "the eldest daughter of the Church" turned on her mother. In 1903 the government found it necessary to call out eleven brigades of the gendarmerie to evict a few priests from the shrine. Only when France lay prostrate at the feet of the invading Germans in 1914 did they call the Oblates back.

Again there was a wonderful rebirth of devotion to "Our Lady of the Good Meeting." Pope Pius XI on March 17, 1924, raised the sanctuary to the dignity of a Roman basilica.

Of all the miracles claimed, the local church authorities feel that a hundred are certainly authenticated by eyewitnesses who have testified under oath, and their signed statements are on file, telling about Matthew Goney, aged 3, who was drowned in a laundry stream. The dead boy was offered to Our Lady of the Willow and instantly revived. There are cases similarly recorded of infants dying at birth before Baptism being revived. In one case the body had even been buried. It was exhumed and brought before the altar of our Lady and instantly brought back to life.

It is most fitting to begin our account of the visits of our Lady to our modern world with the story of "Our Lady of the Good Meeting." She begins and ends her beautiful message from her divine Son in heaven with the same note: conversion. In all she has to say later at Le Laus, Rue de Bac, Our Lady of Victories, La Salette, Lourdes, Pontmain, Pellevoisin, Fatima, Beauraing, and Banneux, about curing bodies, about wars and famines and per-

secutions, in all her promises, she has just that one purpose. In God's dispensation, just as she is the Mother of Christ, so she is the Mother of the Church, His Mystical Body. As she brought her Son into this world, so she travails again and brings us all into the kingdom of heaven. As the great drama of our Blessed Mother's visits to us unfolds, we will see how she uses every means possible to Divine Wisdom Itself to bring her children safely home.

## CHAPTER IV . . . *Le Laus*

"I have requested Le Laus from my Divine Son and He has given it to me. . . . Many sinners will be converted here."

— OUR LADY TO VEN. BENOIT RENCUREL  
at Le Laus, France, 1664

The diocese of Grenoble, in the French Alps, probably has more beautiful scenery than any other part of France. It is beautiful to look at, but a miserable land out of which to scratch a living. The people who live there are in a precarious struggle against starvation. When St. Bruno, founder of the Carthusians, was looking for the wildest and most desolate place to settle and practice the most heroic penances, he went to Dauphiny, to Hugh de Chateauneuf, bishop of Grenoble. Bishop Hugh directed him to an uninhabited wilderness of rocks and snow high in the Alps, and here was founded in 1085 the Grande Chartreuse, home of the Hermits of St. Bruno, the most ascetic order in the entire history of the Church.

Every visit of our Lady that has been recognized by the Church has been to the poor — to the kind of neighbors she had at Nazareth — and usually to children. Perhaps it was the very poverty of the diocese of Grenoble that appealed to the motherly heart of Mary, just as it did to the heart of her devoted son St. Bruno, for she has made three recognized visits there. No other diocese can boast even of two, and there are not many that can claim one.

One day in May, 1664, Benoit Rencurel, age 17, was tending sheep on the mountain of St. Maurice, near an old ruined chapel. She sat down at noon to eat lunch, after which she said her rosary. While she prayed, a very old man, dressed in a red robe, came

near and asked what she did there. With charmingly "naïve simplicity," she answered that she was tending her sheep, was praying to the Good God, and that she was feeling very thirsty. "Yet there is water beside you," he said, and pointed to a clear spring beside her which she had never seen before. When Benoit thanked her visitor and invited him to share her bread, he answered that he was St. Maurice, the patron of the place, and that he desired her to take her flock to a small valley near St. Etienne, where a great grace would be granted her.

Next day Benoit took her sheep to the place. Near evening, standing on a rock known as Les Fours, she saw a lady and child of wonderful beauty. Although the lady did not speak, Benoit was happy just to gaze upon her. These visions continued for two months. Finally word got around to the magistrate of the district, M. Grimaud. He advised her to make a good confession, receive Holy Communion and then on the next occasion ask the lady her name.

Benoit did this, and asked the lady her name the next time she appeared.

*"I am Mary, the Mother of Jesus. It is the will of my Son that I should be honored in this parish, though not on this spot. You will therefore ask the priest to come here with his people in procession."*

After making careful inquiry, the pastor decided to do as he was bidden. On August 29, 1664, he led a solemn procession to Les Fours.

A month passed. On September 29, our Lady appeared to Benoit at another place, on the road to Le Laus, "Go," she commanded, "to Le Laus. There you will find a little chapel where delicious perfumes abound. There you will often find and see me."

Benoit went as she was bid, and in the little hamlet of Le Laus found a ruined chapel, as described by our Lady. She was told that soon it would be enshrined in a large church, that many sinners would be converted there and that the money for the church would come from the poor.

Our Lady said, "*I have requested Le Laus from my Divine Son*

*for the conversion of sinners and He has given it to me. This church will be built in His honor and mine. Many sinners will be converted here."*

As one would expect, great crowds gathered at the little oratory. The ruined chapel being too small, Masses were said at open-air altars. Confessions were heard by the hundreds. So many favors were granted that at last Msgr. Lambert, vicar-general for the archbishop of Embrun ordered a canonical enquiry (Embrun was once in the diocese of Grenoble).

After a long and exhaustive examination, in which Benoit was subjected to every device to break down her story, her testimony was accepted. When the vicar-general was saying Mass at Le Laus, a well-known widow, Catherine Vial, who had been crippled for years, was suddenly restored to full health. This happened on the ninth day of the novena she was making. Her withered and helpless limbs were suddenly restored completely. She rose from her stretcher and walked unaided into the church.

After a searching inquiry by a board of doctors, two of them Calvinists, it was pronounced that the cure was entirely beyond human means. In fact, the doctors announced that they were ready to abjure their heresy and be received into the Church.

Msgr. Lambert gave permission for a church to be built over the original chapel.

Now the second part of our Lady's prediction came true. There was no money to build. Then a poor woman in rags presented a louis d'or — a gold coin, very valuable in those days. As the work progressed each day, just enough money came in to continue. The pilgrims helped the work with their own hands. They would go to the nearby quarry and carry stones. In four years the church was finished.

Now we see the human reaction: both the bishop and the vicar-general died. The chapter of Embrun banned all pilgrimages to Le Laus, fearing that it would interfere with devotion to Our Lady of Embrun. The church was closed and any priest daring to say Mass there was threatened with excommunication!

The new archbishop immediately set aside this childish ruling

and launched a new inquiry of his own. After careful scrutiny, and seeing the great number of conversions, Msgr. de Genlis, the archbishop, said, "Indeed God is in this place."

More troubles beset the sanctuary. In 1692 the Duke of Savoy invaded the country. Benoit fled to Marseilles. The church was pillaged and smashed. When it was restored, it was again built with the pennies of the poor.

The troubles of Le Laus were not ended yet. The new group of priests appointed to serve the place were Jansenists. They denounced devotion to our Lady, banned Benoit from the sacraments and allowed her to attend Mass only once a week.

Finally, in 1712, the archbishop intervened. He dismissed the Jansenists, and appointed a congregation of missionary priests.

Benoit lived to see our Lady's charge to her carried out in full. When she died she was buried in front of the high altar in the church.

The church even survived the fury of the revolution of 1793, when nearly everything else was swept away. In 1855, Pope Pius IX had the statue of our Lady crowned by his personal legate. Leo XIII declared the church a Roman basilica. The church is filled with ex-votos of all kinds, testifying to the wondrous cures that are continually wrought in that holy place. Benoit Rencurel was declared Venerable by Pius IX in 1871. The poor, simple home of her family is still preserved as it was when she died in 1672, which, like the chacot of the Soubirous family at Lourdes, is a mute testimony that Mary is the loving Mother of the poor.

When our Lady told Benoit that she would find delicious perfumes at Le Laus, she was as good as her word. Many pilgrims report that even today the little valley is filled with a heavenly scent which is different from any known odor and which comes from no traceable source. The people in the neighborhood call the odor "Les Parfumes du Laus."

## CHAPTER V . . . *The Miraculous Medal*

"Times are very evil. Among the troubles that will beset France, the throne will be upset . . . the archbishop will die . . . the Cross will be trampled on . . . blood will run in the streets . . . and the world will be plunged in sadness . . . but do you come to the foot of this altar, and there graces will be showered upon all who ask for them with faith and fervor."

— OUR LADY TO ST. CATHERINE LABOURE,  
Paris, July 18, 1830

A complete change had come over the world between our Lady's visit to Venerable Benoit Rencurel in Dauphiny in 1664 and her visit to St. Catherine Laboure in Paris in 1830. It seemed Lucifer, who had been chained "for a thousand years," had been allowed to break his bonds. The Rationalists, led by Voltaire, had tried to destroy all idea of God. The Reign of Terror had swept away the "Ancien régime." The head of Louis XVI had fallen. Nobles, clergy, and anyone who might oppose the "reign of reason" were liquidated. The very days of the week and the months of the year were changed to wipe out forever all Christian tradition.

The storm blew itself out. The monarchy and the Church were restored, but France — and the world — were never the same again.

No longer does Mary come just to bring back heretics to the Faith. No longer is she concerned simply with the conversion of individual sinners. The battle has attained much wider scope. The challenge was extended to the whole life of the nation, and she accepted that challenge.

Zoe Laboure was born in 1806, one of the youngest of seventeen children. Her parents were solid, hard-working Christian peasants.

Her sister Marie Louise became a sister of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and Zoe hoped to follow in her footsteps. After long opposition, her father finally consented. In 1830 we find her, under the name of "Sister Catherine" in the Vincentian mother house at 140 Rue du Bac in Paris.

On the night of July 18, the eve of the feast of St. Vincent de Paul, Sister Catherine was awakened in the dormitory by a four- or five-year-old child, whom she later thought to be her guardian angel.

"Come to the Chapel," the child said. "The Holy Virgin is waiting for you."

Troubled and filled with astonishment, Sister Catherine answered, "How can I get up and cross the dormitory without awaking my companions?"

The child answered, "Be at ease. It is half past eleven and everyone is asleep. I will come with you."

So Catherine did as she was bidden. She dressed, followed the child and went to the chapel. Adding to her amazement, she found it lit up "as if for Midnight Mass."

The child led her up to the altar rail, where she knelt down. "Here is the Holy Virgin," he announced. Suddenly she heard a rustling, as of a silk dress, and a Lady of matchless beauty stepped forward and took her seat on the chair usually reserved for the director of the Seminary. She was dressed in an ivory-colored robe with a blue mantle. A white veil fell over her shoulders. With the simplicity of a child, Catherine stepped forward, fell on her knees and rested her clasped hands on the knees of the Blessed Virgin.

"At that moment," she declared afterward, "I felt the sweetest emotion of my life, impossible to describe. I cannot say how long I remained like that. All I know is that after speaking to me a long time the Holy Virgin left, disappearing like a cloud that has evaporated."

After the Holy Virgin had left, the child led Catherine back to the dormitory. As she got into bed the clock outside was striking two.

As in most of the visits of our Lady, much was told Catherine of a purely personal nature, which has never been revealed. But at least this much has been preserved from an actual record in Catherine's own handwriting:

*"My child, God wishes you to undertake a mission. For it you will have much to suffer, but you will overcome that by recalling that you do so for the Glory of God."*

*"Times are very evil. Among the troubles that will beset France, the Throne will be upset. The entire world will be distressed with afflictions. But do you come to the foot of this altar — here she pointed with her right hand — and there graces will be showered upon all who ask for them with faith and fervor. They will be bestowed upon the great and upon the small."*

Then, after making certain declarations about the future of the Community and its progress, she said, "I love it very much."

*"But grave troubles are coming. There will be great danger. Do not fear. God and Saint Vincent will protect the Community. I myself shall be with you."*

*"At one moment, when the danger is acute, everyone will believe that all is lost. You will recall my visit and the protection of God . . .*

*"But it will not be the same for the others, or for the clergy of Paris. There will indeed be victims. The Archbishop will die . . . the Cross will be trampled on, blood will run in the streets . . . the world will be plunged in sadness."*

She revealed that the last of these events would take place "in forty years," i.e., about 1870.

Sister Catherine was charged to tell no one except her confessor, Father Aladel. The good father was gravely perplexed, but dismissed it all as the imaginings of an overwrought novice.

Imagine Father Aladel's surprise when, a few days later, a revolution suddenly broke out in Paris. The Reign of Terror burst out again all over France. The Cross was trampled on, monasteries and convents pillaged, priests were persecuted and the Archbishop was forced to hide. Just as our Lady had foretold, on July 31, Charles X abdicated. The white banner of the Bourbons

with the gold fleurs-de-lis was trampled in the gutter and the Duke of Orleans, a "citizen king" wearing the tricolor of the revolution, was installed as Louis Philippe.

Surprisingly too, as Sister Catherine had foretold, the convent in the Rue du Bac was never touched, although the battle raged around it and the building shook with the fire of cannons.

Needless to say, Father Aladel revised his opinion of Sister Catherine's story.

On Saturday, November 27, the Sisters were gathered in the chapel for meditation before supper. In the silence, Sister Catherine thought she heard the distant rustle of silk. Looking toward the altar, she saw our Lady, "So lovely that no words could describe her beauty." Dressed in a robe of shining white, her head was covered with a white veil that hung to her feet on either side. Her feet rested on a globe. Her hands clasped another globe surmounted by a small cross. Her eyes were turned toward heaven; her face shone; her lips moved as she offered the globe to our Lord. The globe then disappeared, and her hands were stretched out. Her fingers were covered with rings studded with precious stones, which reflected rays of various colors of such brilliance that they hid the lower part of her body.

"As I was absorbed in this contemplation," wrote Sister Catherine, "the Holy Virgin lowered her eyes on me and her voice penetrated my heart:

*"My child, the globe you saw represented the entire world, France in particular, and especially every single person."*

"Here," Catherine goes on, "I do not know how to express what I saw, but the Holy Virgin added: *'The sparkling rays of light are a symbol of the graces which I bestow upon all those who ask of me.'*

"Then there was formed around about the Virgin in oval tableau, on which was written in golden letters: 'O Marie, concue sans peche, priez pour nous qui avons recours a vous.' ('O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.')

Then the vision changed and Catherine saw a letter "M" sur-

mounted by a cross standing on a bar. Beneath this were two hearts, one surrounded by a circlet of thorns, the other pierced by a sword, which she took to represent the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

She then heard a voice say, "Make a medal after this model. Those who carry it with piety will receive great graces; above all, those who carry it round their necks; graces abundant for those who have confidence."

Although Sister Catherine told her confessor, "The Holy Virgin wishes a medal to be struck with this image," Father Aladel still seemed to be unimpressed.

Our Lady appeared to Catherine again a few days later in chapel at the same time in the evening. She was dressed exactly as before, and repeated the same message. This time she appeared directly over the tabernacle of the main altar. On the globe of the world and beneath her feet was a serpent, with our Lady's heel crushing his head. Her robe was studded with gems, but some of the gems seemed dull and lifeless. Our Lady told Catherine that these represented "The graces people forget to ask for." Again Sister Catherine told her confessor of our Lady's request, but again nothing was done.

Sister Catherine received the habit in January, 1831, and was sent to the Hospice of Enghien to look after old people. This was her home for the next forty-six years, but she returned to the mother house from time to time to visit her confessor. In March and September of that year, she was again granted visions of the medal. In September, our Lady repeated her request and showed displeasure that her orders had not been carried out.

Father Aladel finally took action. Although he had preserved a cold exterior toward Catherine, he had been carefully studying her family background, her character, her standing with other nuns, and the meaning of her message. Now he approached Archbishop Quelen, and turned the case over to him. The Archbishop made further inquiries, all of which corroborated the good opinion of Fr. Aladel. But he felt that there was not sufficient corroboration to recognize the visions. However, as the medal expressed per-

fectly Catholic doctrine and encouraged devotion to Mary Immaculate, he ordered that a number of them be struck.

Now came the events which caused it to be known as the "Miraculous Medal." Theologians tell us that the conversion of a sinner, being an act of God in the moral order upon the free will of man, is in a way a greater miracle than raising the dead. And it is much harder to convert an apostate priest than a fallen away layman. And an apostate archbishop is far more difficult.

Archbishop de Pradt, of Malines, a predecessor of Cardinal Mercier, had apostatized during the Revolution. Ever since he refused to submit to the Pope. Now he was at the point of death. Although he had resisted the storm of prayers and entreaties offered for his conversion, Archbishop Quelen went to him armed with one of the new medals. Immediately, the apostate prelate humbly retracted all his errors, begged pardon of the Pope, was received back into the Church, and having received the Last Sacraments, died in the arms of Archbishop Quelen.

After two more years during which such miracles, of soul and body, were showered upon those wearing the medal, Archbishop Quelen ordered a canonical inquiry. The reality of the apparitions was upheld, and in a pastoral letter the archbishop urged all to carry the medal and recite the prayer inscribed on it.

Our Lady had charged Sister Catherine to tell the vision only to her confessor. Even the Mother Superior, Sister Dufes, had only heard "a rumor which she did not feel inclined to heed."

Father Aladel died in 1865, leaving Catherine without anybody in whom to confide about the apparitions. One day, in 1876, Sister Dufes was amazed to see Catherine burst into tears. When she inquired the cause, Catherine answered, "Perhaps I can tell you tomorrow. I shall ask permission of the Holy Mother during Meditation." Next day, Sister Catherine told the superior that she had received our Lady's permission because now her mission on earth was complete. She then proceeded to tell the whole story as she had told it to Fr. Aladel.

Sister Catherine predicted that she would not live to see 1877. She died on December 31, 1876.

In 1897, Pope Leo XIII commissioned Cardinal Richard as his special legate to crown the statue in the chapel at Rue du Bac which had been made to represent the apparition. Catherine's cause had been introduced before the Congregation of Rites two years before. She was beatified by Pius XI in 1933 and canonized by Pius XII in 1947.

Her body was exhumed from its original resting place in Rue de Reuilly on March 22, 1933 and brought to Rue du Bac. It was in a perfect state of preservation — the eyes that had gazed on our Lady, the hands that had rested on her knees, the whole body the same as the day she died. It is now under the altar to which our Lady pointed, behind glass, beside the chair in which our Lady sat during the first visit.

Only now, after more than a century, are we beginning to realize how utterly and literally true were the warning words of our Lady, "The times are evil . . . the entire world will be distressed with afflictions." The most important function of a mother is to save her children from a terrible danger that is menacing. Since 1830, Mary has been using every means that even God could devise to do this for us. If we perish in the holocaust, it will only be because we refused to heed her warnings.

## CHAPTER VI . . . *Our Lady of Victories*

"Having arrived in Paris, Papa took us to see the sights. For me there was only one — Our Lady of Victories. What I felt in her sanctuary I cannot say. The graces she granted me resembled those of my First Communion."

— ST. THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS, 1887

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, like devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, is a late flowering blossom in the garden of Catholic devotion. Although it has its roots in the original deposit of faith, like all genuine devotions, only in the last few centuries "as the world grew cold," as one of the Popes aptly put it, has either devotion flowered forth in full vigor. It seemed as if God in His infinite wisdom had saved these devotions until the chilling touch of the Calvinists and the Jansenists had paralyzed men's hearts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and driven them away from God by their brutally harsh and forbidding doctrines.

When Mary and Joseph presented our Lord in the temple, Simeon predicted to Mary, "Thy own soul a sword shall pierce." At the very beginning of our Lord's life, Mary was told the part she would play as our co-redemptrix, joining with her Son in His offering on the cross. At the end of our Lord's life we find her standing beside her Son's cross, her heart transfixed during His three hours' agony. So it is that her most pure heart has always been represented as transfixed by a sword.

We honor the Sacred Heart of Jesus because of the infinite love He has for us, and the heart is the symbol of love. We honor the Heart of Mary because of the perfect love she has in

her heart for her divine Son. We study to imitate the perfect virtues that inspired that heart so that we too can draw closer to her Son — "To Jesus through Mary." We also come to her as the "refuge of sinners," asking her to encompass us in her motherly heart and reconcile us to her Son.

When the Mother of all the living wends her way through the world looking after her children, as one century follows another, she does it with a matchless grace of God's most perfect creature. Almost instantly one can detect the harsh and deformed imitation apparitions her archenemy occasionally stages to discredit her, and drive people away from her. The story of Our Lady of Victories is one of the most beautiful examples of our Mother's kindness to her children.

The story goes back to two other shrines of our Lady: Montaigu in Belgium and Savona in Italy.

Near Louvain there is a sharp spur of hills rising from the flat plain of that "low country" which the Flemish call *Scherpenheuvel* ("Sharp Hill"). It is better known by its French name of "Montaigu" (from the Latin *Mons Acutus*, with the same meaning).

As the Cathedral of Our Lady of Chartres is built over a grotto where, it is said, the Druids offered sacrifice before the time of Christ to the "Virgin about to give birth," so apparently the great oak that stood alone at the crest of Montaigu was the scene of worship for the pagan Druids. People are very slow to give up their pagan superstitions, and the Church has found it best to recognize the element of truth always to be found in pagan worship and build a church to the true God and to His saints on the very spot where people had worshiped God for generations. Although the origins of Montaigu go far beyond the period to which the "memory of man runneth," we find a wooden figure of our Lady placed in a natural niche in the great oak in the fourteenth century.

One day a shepherd going by noticed that the wind had dislodged the statue. When he decided to take it home, he found himself transfixed to the spot. He could move only when he

replaced the statue in its place. This was not the first time our Lady picked out her own spot, nor would it be the last.

Montaigu's fame as a shrine of our Lady spread far and wide. Alexander Farnese, a comrade of Don Juan of Austria who led the Christians to victory over the Turks in the battle of Lepanto in 1571, prayed at the shrine of Montaigu before beginning his reconquest of the Low Countries for His Most Catholic Majesty Philip II of Spain.

Miraculous cures and conversions multiplied. The Geux and other heretics at various times would wreck the shrine, and the Catholics would proceed to rebuild it, each time in a more magnificent way. Pope St. Pius V, the Pope of the Victory of the Most Holy Rosary at Lepanto, recognized Montaigu as the Verdun of the Faith in the Low Countries. He granted the shrine many indulgences and privileges.

Archduke Albert and Infanta Isabella took the shrine under their special protection. As at Loretto, they built a magnificent basilica around the little church. The oak tree, which had been stripped by pilgrims seeking souvenirs, was cut up and made into little replicas of the original statue. The original roster of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Montaigu is still preserved. This magnificent volume of illuminated vellum is a "Who's Who" of distinguished Catholics during the wars of religion for the next two hundred years, with their coats of arms and signatures.

Montaigu was one of the two great roots of the shrine of Our Lady of Victories in Paris. The other root struck into the fertile soil of Italy.

On March 18, 1536, Antonio Botta set out for work in the valley that extends up into the hills back of Savona, which is eighteen miles west along the coast from Genoa. When he came near a mountain stream, he obeyed a mysterious impulse to kneel beside it. Suddenly, he heard himself called by name. When he looked up, he beheld a beautiful lady standing on a stone in the midst of the stream. She was surrounded by a dazzling globe of light which seemed bright as the sun.

She told him, "*Be not afraid, Antonio. It is I, Mary. Go to*

*your confessor and bid him tell the people in church that they must fast for the next three Saturdays in honor of the Mother of God. You must go to confession and receive the Sacrament instituted by my Son, and then, on the fourth Saturday, come back here because I have more to say to you."*

A visionary is usually greeted by skepticism, and often by outright hostility when he tells his tale to the priest. But in this case the father believed him. Soon the vicar-general of the diocese made a searching inquiry into the whole case, made a formal record, and directed the three Saturdays of prayer and penance.

Antonio returned to the brook on the fourth Saturday. True to her word, our Lady appeared again. Her garments were whiter than snow, she was sparkling with jewels and her hands were extended as if in welcome to all her children.

"*Go to Savona*," she said, "*to those to whom you have already announced my former visit, and renew my instructions with even greater insistence, calling upon them to leave their sins and their vices. Bid all, especially the religious and members of the confraternities, to make three processions in penance, because my Son is greatly stirred in anger towards the world because of its iniquity; and unless they do these things, short will be their lives.*"

Thinking of the way he had been cross-examined by the vicar-general, Antonio asked for a sign which might convince the people of the truth of his story.

"*Go!*" she said, "*and I will give them an inward sign so that when they hear these things they will believe them without other signs. Many will be inspired to do as I ask.*"

Then the Lady raised her hands above the stream, as if blessing it. She said three times, "*Mercy and not Justice, my Son!*" Then she disappeared, but left a sweet odor, which remained in the valley for some time.

Just as she had predicted, when Antonio related his story, people were moved by an inward sign. Even as he was giving his account to the vicar-general people outside began to cry out in the very words of our Lady, "*Mercy and not Justice. Have mercy*

thou, our most holy Advocate!" They flocked to the churches, singing hymns and praying to the Mother of Mercies.

From that day in 1536, a constant stream of pilgrims has been coming to the stream where our Lady appeared. As at Lourdes, many come on stretchers and bathe in the water. And many have been cured.

The most distinguished visitor was Pope Pius VII, who was brought there a prisoner of Napoleon in 1809. He remained in Savona for three years, when he was moved to Fountainbleu. His Holiness vowed that if he was ever liberated, he would come and crown the statue with his own hands.

On May 10, 1815, after Napoleon had been defeated, the Holy Father fulfilled his vow. Surrounded by a brilliant retinue of the royalty of Italy, his Cardinals and a vast crowd of people, he said Mass at the shrine, blessed the crown and placed it on our Lady's head with his own hands. Soon after, he permitted the Office of Our Lady of Mercy to be said throughout the diocese.

With this dual prologue we come to Our Lady of Victories in Paris. On the way to Montmarte, which is now dominated by the great basilica of the Sacred Heart, Queen Margaret of Valois, in 1590, founded the church that was to become the shrine of devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The discalced Augustinians, who were known as the "Little Fathers" took care of the place.

In 1619, Father Angel of St. Claire, from the Netherlands, joined the community. He brought one of the little statues of Our Lady of Montaigu which has been carved from the oak at the shrine. From that day, a number of graces were granted in the church, such as those which seem always to accompany the Pilgrim Virgin of Fatima. Soon the church became too small. They appealed to Louis XIII, who was inclined at the moment to erect a thank-offering to our Lady for his victory over the Huguenots at LaRochelle. So the present church was built.

Time rolled on. Louis XIV ascended the throne of France. For all his magnificence, he did not forget to turn to our Lady

for help. In 1661 he sent a humble brother of the "Little Fathers" with urgent petitions to our Lady at her Holy House at Loretto. Brother Fiacre's ship was forced by storms to seek refuge in the port of Savona. They happened to make port on the day the people were celebrating the anniversary of our Lady's visit to Antonio Botta in 1536. Going up to the shrine with the townspeople, the brother was so impressed with the devotion to the Mother of Mercies, Refuge of Sinners, that he brought the devotion back with him to Paris. A fine statue of Our Lady of Savona was erected in the church, and another jewel was added to the crown of Our Lady of Victories. It was well that devotion to our Lady struck deep in the hearts of the people, because the storm broke one hundred and thirty years later which would shake that devotion to its very roots.

Just as the "Goddess of Reason" disported herself on the altar of Notre Dame, so Diana disported herself in Our Lady of Victories when the revolutionaries took over in 1791. They indulged in every bestial practice they could devise in their frenzy to desecrate the shrine. After that the "Juring priests," who swore to collaborate with the revolutionaries, took over; and still later it was used as a stock exchange.

Finally the storm blew itself out. In 1809 it was made a "chapel of ease" to the neighboring parish church of St. Augustine. In 1832 it was again made a parish church and Father Charles des Genettes was appointed pastor.

Prayer and fasting helped to restore the faith after all that had happened, and it seemed to Father Charles that even that would not be enough. Once a people have had the faith and lost it, a miracle greater than raising the dead is needed to bring it back. And God does not grant such miracles often, as Father Charles found out. Sunday after Sunday he said Mass in a church that was practically empty, where before the Terror they were standing out in the street. As time wore on, the paralyzing realization dawned on him that his mission was a failure and he would be forced to resign. He was simply getting nowhere.

On December 3, 1836 — six years after our Lady had appeared

to Sister Catherine Laboure across town on the left bank of the Seine — as he was saying Mass, he heard a calm, clear voice say "Consecrate your parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary."

When he returned to the sacristy, he struggled with himself. He would be the last to believe in any supernatural manifestations, especially in his own case. Yet he could not deny the evidence of his senses. Finally he decided that it was all an illusion brought on by his depressed state, and knelt down to make his thanksgiving. Again, clearly and without any chance for a mistake, he again heard the words, "Consecrate your parish to the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary."

There could be no doubt about it. Here was a direct order from heaven. He drew up a set of rules for a confraternity of our Lady, secured the archbishop's approval, and announced the new confraternity to the ten people at Mass the following Sunday. He proposed to have Vespers of Our Lady that evening, when the confraternity would be launched. The audacity of heaven — he could get only ten for Mass, and he dared to hope for somebody at Vespers?

At seven o'clock, when Father Charles entered the church, it was crowded, with men in large numbers. In singing the Litany of Loretto, when they came to the petition "refuge of sinners," by one common impulse, and without any suggestion from anyone, they repeated it three times and then cried out "Spare thy people, O Lord."

The Mother of Mercies, refuge of sinners, who had inspired the people of Savona to penance, now had come to claim her erring children in Paris.

An ocean of grace seemed to flood the old shrine of our Lady. Pope Gregory XVI formally sanctioned the "Universal Archconfraternity of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary," which at present numbers over one and one half million members. The shrine numbers almost 90,000 ex-votos.

On March 11, 1855, at the end of a novena of thanksgiving for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception

(December 8, 1854), the statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was seen to move. The Holy Father himself, Pius IX, had a rigorous investigation of the facts alleged. Finding that the event passed all tests, he ordered the statue crowned in recognition of heaven's approval of the devotion.

Seven centuries before, St. Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux some miles to the eastward in France, had penned: "Remember, Most Gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, besought thy aid or asked thy intercession, was left unaided."

These words are still true.

## CHAPTER VII . . . Our Lady of Sion

“. . . the perfect and instantaneous conversion of Alphonse Marie Ratisbonne from Judaism to the Catholic Faith was a true and signal miracle wrought by the all-good and all-great God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

— CARDINAL PATRIZZI of the Congregation of Rites, June 3, 1842

The most famous and most magnificent miracle of grace, of all those wrought by our Lady on those who wore her Miraculous Medal, was the conversion of Alphonse Marie Ratisbonne.

Conversions from Judaism have always been rare, but the conversion of Alphonse seemed the most unlikely of all. Born at Strasbourg of a wealthy Jewish family, he studied law at Paris and became a member of his father's banking firm. He scoffed all forms of religion, but his contempt turned into burning hatred when his brother Theodore became a Catholic. Priests, churches, nuns, and especially the Jesuits roused him to fury. Although the Jewish religion meant nothing to him, he took a great interest in the welfare of his race.

Theodore became a priest and was invited to come to Our Lady of Victories in Paris to work. He left Strasbourg, telling his brothers and sisters that he would pray for their conversion — which Alphonse took as an insult.

Alphonse meanwhile had become engaged to a young girl. Because of her extreme youth, it was decided that this would be the ideal time for the young man to take a year off, travel and see the world. His first stop was Rome, where he learned the

glories of the ancient pagan empire and of the Church he despised. While there he met an old schoolmate M. Gustave de Bussiers, who took him home to dine with his father, the Baron de Bussiers, a recent convert from Protestantism.

Alphonse's visit to Rome finally drew to a close. He planned to leave for Naples and the Near East on January 20, 1842, so he started his round of farewell visits to his friends. He called at the Baron's house, intending only to leave his card, but as chance would have it he was ushered in and introduced to the family. During the visit, the Baron told him of the glories of the Church. Only respect for the Baroness and the children restrained Alphonse from becoming violent and abusive.

"Well," said the Baron, "since you profess such very liberal doctrines, and have so very enlightened a spirit, will you put your courage to a very innocent trial?"

"What shall this be?" asked Alphonse.

"To wear something I am going to give you. See it is a medal of the Blessed Virgin. You may think it ridiculous, but for my part I attach great value to it."

Alphonse looked upon the idea as childish superstition. Hardly able to restrain his amusement, he consented, thinking it would be an amusing keepsake for his bride-to-be. He agreed to take it for that reason. Putting it around his neck, he said, mockingly, "Ha! Here I am, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman!"

Hoping against hope that our Lady would hear his prayer, the Baron then said, "Come, we must complete the trial. You must repeat the Memorare morning and evening. It is a short and very efficacious prayer, which St. Bernard addressed to the Blessed Virgin."

"If it does me no good," said Alphonse, "at least it will do me no harm."

Alphonse then took the prayer, promising to copy it and say it, according to the bargain.

That evening he went to the theater. When he returned home he copied the prayer and went to bed.

He returned the prayer to the Baron in the morning. Although

he had made his mind up to leave, and had resisted the urging of his friends to prolong his visit, when the Baron urged him to stay a little longer, by some unaccountable influence he agreed to do so.

"What, O my God!" exclaimed Alphonse later in his narrative, "was this irresistible impulse that made me do that which I would not? Was it not the same which forced me to make a visit I disliked, when I had no time for those I really wished to make? O Providential guidance! There is then a mysterious influence which guides a man on the road of life. I had received at birth the name of Tobias, along with that of Alphonse. I had forgotten the first name; but my invisible agent did not forget it. He was the true friend which Heaven had sent me; but I did not know him. Alas! there are many Tobiases in the world who do not know that celestial guide, and who resist his voice!"

On the following day, the Baron took a walk with his friend, turning the conversation to religious subjects. For answers he was greeted with sarcasm and even blasphemy. As they passed the Scala Sancta (The Holy Stairs),\* the Baron tipped his hat and exclaimed, "Hail, holy staircase! Behold a sinner who will one day ascend you on his knees!" One can imagine the answer this brought from Alphonse.

For the next few days, the Baron kept repeating the Memorare for his friend's conversion, but apparently with no effect.

Finally the day of departure arrived.

The Baron was on his way to the church of St. Andrea della Fratre when he met Alphonse. Asking him to accompany him, the two went to church together. Leaving M. Ratisbonne in church to examine the building, the Baron went to speak to the monks about the funeral of the Marquis de la Ferronays, who was to be buried there the next day. On coming back ten minutes later, he could not see Alphonse. Finally he found him prostrate on the

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\* Historians tell us that these marble stairs of the Pretorium of Pilate were ascended by our Lord Himself during His Passion. St. Helena, mother of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, brought them to Rome about 326. They were made part of the ancient private chapel of the popes in the Lateran, which was called the "Holy of Holies" because it contained so many relics.

floor before the altar of St. Michael the Archangel. He spoke to him and touched him but could get no answer.

Finally Alphonse looked up, his face bathed in tears. His hands were clasped together and he was unable to speak. He told the Baron that he had something to say that he could hardly express.

"Oh, how M. de la Feronays must have prayed for me," he finally said.

The Baron at length led his friend out of the church. All that Alphonse would say was, "Lead me where you will. After what I have seen I can but obey." Then he took the medal he wore and kissed it, murmuring words of gratitude and love. Alphonse was almost incoherent, but he finally managed to say, his voice shaken with emotion, "How good God is! What joy until now unknown! How great is my happiness! How those are to be pitied who do not believe!"

More than this Alphonse would not say. "Take me to a priest," he told the Baron. When he was brought to Fr. Villefort, S.J., of the Gesu church, he fell on his knees. Continuing to kiss the medal, he said, "I have seen her! I have seen her!"

Then he told what happened: "I had been a minute or two in the church when I became a prey to an indescribable feeling of distress. When I looked up, the whole building around me seemed to have disappeared. I could only see one chapel which had, as it were, gathered all light unto itself, and there in the midst of the light, standing on an altar, beautiful and majestic, was the Blessed Virgin Mary as represented on this medal. I was drawn to her as by an irresistible impulse. She made a sign to me to kneel down, and then seemed to say, 'That is well.' She did not speak, but I understood everything."

There could be no chance of illusion — he did not see a picture or statue of our Lady, for this chapel was dedicated to the Archangel Michael who conquered Lucifer and his rebellious angels. St. Michael has always been looked upon by the Jewish people as their champion.

When questioned further, M. Ratisbonne said that at first he had gazed at the radiant Virgin in all her splendor, but soon

her brilliance was so great that it hurt his eyes. Three times he tried to look at her face, but his eyes could go no higher than her hands.

"I could not give an idea in words," he said, "of the mercy and liberality expressed in those hands. It was not only rays of light that I saw escaping there. Words fail to give you an idea of the ineffable gifts that flow from those hands of our Mother! The mercy, the tenderness, and the wealth of heaven escape from there in torrents on the souls of those whom Mary protects."

Alphonse was baptized in Gesu church. Nearly all Rome turned out for the triumphant occasion. Abbe Dupanloup, later bishop of Orleans, and perhaps the greatest preacher of his day, said on the occasion, "O you, on whom all eyes are fixed on at this moment, tell us by what secret ways the Lord has led you thither. It is for you to tell us how the sun of truth first rose in your soul and what was its brilliant dawn. . . . Quae est ista (who is this)? You are the Mother of Our Saviour, and Jesus the fruit of your womb is the God blessed of all ages. As child of Adam you are our sister. . . . You are the masterpiece of the Power Divine, and His mercy's sweetest smile. O God, give light to the blind, that they may see Mary, and hearts to those without hearts, that they may love her."

Pope Gregory XVI received Alphonse in audience, and something unheard of, even took him into his private bedroom to show him on the wall the picture of the Immaculate Conception as represented by the Miraculous Medal.

Because the conversion happened in the diocese of Rome itself, the Holy Father initiated a canonical examination into the miraculous nature of the event. It was the decision of the commission "that the perfect and instantaneous conversion of Alphonse Marie Ratisbonne from Judaism to the Catholic faith was a true and signal miracle wrought by the all-good and all-great God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (June 3, 1842).

M. Ratisbonne became a priest and worked with his brother Abbé Theodore. They founded the two congregations known as

"The Work of Our Lady of Sion." These men and women are devoted to the task of converting the Jews to the realization that Jesus is really the Messias for whom they have been waiting all these centuries. And they are doing it through special devotion to His Immaculate Mother. Since then the Fathers and Sisters of Our Lady of Sion have spread throughout the world.

Alphonse spent his last years in Jerusalem and died forty years later in the Holy City with the name of Mary on his lips.

In the dozen years that followed her visit to Rue du Bac, our Immaculate Mother had gone a long way to bring fallen Paris back to the faith, especially at her church of Our Lady of Victories, where an archconfraternity devoted to her Immaculate Heart was founded, which spread all over the world, and even started bringing in numbers of her own race, once God's chosen people.

Truly, the Age of Mary was dawning in all its splendor!

## CHAPTER VIII . . . *La Salette*

"The Apparition of La Salette is incomparably more understandable to us than it was for the generation of 1846. . . . We comprehend better today the advice, the warnings and the promises of the Virgin in tears. We see them not only in their relation to the situation in France, in that epoch, but also to that of the actual world which has plunged itself into a desperate chaos."

"If we draw near the present hour, La Salette appears as the ultimatum of Divine Mercy and resounds through the world as the agonized echo of the threats of the Saviour, 'Unless you do penance you shall all perish!' (Lk. 13:3.)"

— CARDINAL HLONG, Primate of Poland,  
August 5, 1947

Two centuries, lacking three years, had gone by in the land of the Dauphin since our Lady had appeared to the willow cutter. La Grande Chartreuse, home of the Carthusian monks, continued on its serene course high in the Alps. For eight and a half centuries, the sons of St. Bruno had been singing the praises of God untouched by the troubles and storms around them, almost as remote and serene as Orion and the Pleiades.

But the world and France had gone a long way down the valley of death: the Renaissance of ancient Greek and Roman arts and letters in the mid-fifteenth century brought a flood of pagan customs and morals that had been unknown in the Ages of Faith.

In the sixteenth century, under the pretext of "reforming" the Church, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and a host of others, each set himself up as the founder of Christ's church. Each had a different

set of beliefs, which continually changed, and each of his followers had his own set. Cut off from the Vicar of Christ and denouncing Catholics' reverence for the Mother of God as "Mariolatry," northern Europe fell from one error into a worse one.

The "wars of religion" of the seventeenth century left more moral havoc in its wake than do even ordinary wars.

In the eighteenth century the encyclopedists and rationalists — Voltaire, Rousseau, and the rest — rebelled against all forms of Christianity. The devil continued to concoct his hellish brew. In Brussels, at the very time of our Lady's visit to La Salette, Karl Marx was busy writing his *Communist Manifesto*: "Religion," he said, "is the opiate of the people." The capitalist oppressors of the poor, in the Marxist philosophy, used religion to deaden the people's sense of wrong. His books became the Communist bible, his words became a rallying cry for the enemies of God. Truly, as our Lady warned in 1830 at Rue du Bac, "The times are evil."

On Ember Saturday, September 19, 1846, the Church all over the world was fasting to ask God's blessing on the harvest. The Church was singing the office for the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, "O Virgin of Sion, Thy sorrow is great as the waters of the sea." Maximin Giraud, aged eleven, and Melanie Mathieu-Calvet, aged fifteen, were minding cows that were grazing on a mountaintop six miles from the village of La Salette.

Hearing the Angelus bell at noon, they drove their cows to a tiny stream to drink, had lunch, and lay down for a nap. Melanie soon woke up, and finding that the cattle had strayed, woke up Maximin to help find them. From the brow of the hill they soon discovered where they were, when their eyes were arrested by a very brilliant light. Soon this light appeared to open and they discerned a lady sitting on a stone by the dried spring. She had her head in her hands and seemed to be weeping bitterly. She was wearing a white robe studded with pearls, a gold colored apron, and roses of many colors at her feet. She had a wreath of roses around her headdress, which was a high cap slightly bent in front. Hanging from her neck by a small chain was a crucifix,

with a hammer on one side and a pinchers on the other. The lady was about thirty yards away.

Melanie had dropped her stick, but Maximin picked it up and gave it to her. He had kept his own. "If it tries to hurt us, I will give it a good knock with this," he said.

After a moment the lady stood up and beckoned to them. "*Come near, children, and don't be frightened. I have come to tell you some great news.*"

Maximin later described her as being made up entirely of light, just as Lucy and the other children described Our Lady of Fatima, and as she appeared at many other apparitions.

It should be noted that while the lady was talking Maximin's dog, which was supposed to be rather fierce, settled down by the lady's feet, his head on his paws, and lay there calmly throughout the apparition.

Her brilliance was greater than that of the sun, Melanie said that the sun was not to be compared to her. In spite of the brilliant rays surrounding her, the children were reassured and came up close to her. Melanie could see the tears falling from her eyes. Standing between them, she said, "If my people will not submit, I shall be obliged to let go my Son's hand which is so strong and so heavy that I can no longer restrain it.

"For what a long time I have suffered for you! If I would not have my Son abandon you, I am forced to pray to Him without ceasing. But, as for you, you pay no heed. However much you pray, no matter what you do, you can never recompense the trouble I have taken for you.

"Six days have I given you to labor, I have reserved the seventh for myself; yet you will not give it to me. It is this that makes my Son's hand so heavy.

"Wagoners cannot swear without introducing the name of my Son. These two things are what makes the hand of my Son so heavy.

"If the harvest is spoiled, you yourselves are the only cause of it. I gave you warning last year with the potato crop, but you paid no heed. On the contrary, when the potatoes were spoiled,

you swore and blasphemed my Son's Name. They will go on rotting as before, and this year by Christmas there will be none left."

So far our Lady had spoken in French, and Melanie had trouble understanding the last sentence, because in the local patois potatoes are not called *pommes de terre* but *truffes*. As she was about to ask Maximin the meaning, our Lady, knowing her thoughts, said,

*"Ah, my children, you do not understand me; I will speak differently."* She repeated in patois, and then continued in the local dialect, *"If you have corn (wheat) you must not sow it; all that you sow the beasts will eat; any that comes up will fall to powder as you thresh it. There will come a great famine; and before the famine the children under seven years will be seized with a trembling, and will die in the hands of those that hold them; the rest will do penance by the famine. The walnuts will become bad, the grapes will rot."*

After a pause, it seemed to Melanie that the Lady was speaking to Maximin, but she could not hear what she said. After this, she spoke to Melanie without being heard by Maximin. Each was charged to keep the secret, which they revealed to no one except to the Pope himself.

Then again she spoke to them both, *"If the people are converted, the very rocks and stones will turn into heaps of grain. The potatoes will be self-sown in the earth."*

*"In summer, only a few old women go to Mass on Sunday. The others work. In winter, they have nothing else to do, the boys go to Mass just to mock at religion. The world takes no notice of Lent. People go to the butchers like dogs."*

Then the Lady asked the children, *"Do you pray well, my children?"*

*"Not very well, Madam,"* they answered.

*"Then you must be sure to say your prayers carefully every night and morning. When you cannot do better say at least one 'Pater' and one 'Ave Maria.' But when you have time and when you can do better, say more."*

Then she continued. "Did you ever see wheat that was spoiled, my children?"

"No, Ma'am," answered Maximin. Melanie answered the same.

Then the Lady reminded Maximin, "You have seen it, my child, at Coin with your father. The owner of the land there told your father to go and see his wheat that was spoiled. You went, both of you, and took two or three heads of wheat in your hands; you rubbed them and they crumbled into dust. Then you went home, and while you were about a half hour's walk from home your father gave you a piece of bread, and said, 'Take this, my child. Let us eat it this year while we can get it. I don't know who will be able to eat any next year, if the wheat goes on like that.'"

Maximin answered, "Oh yes, Ma'am, I remember now. Just now I had forgotten all about it."

At the end of her visit, as at the beginning, our Lady spoke French, "Well, my children, you will cause this news to be told to all my people."

After this, our Lady crossed the bed of the dried-up stream. Never walking, she seemed to glide over the top of the grass, just as the children reported at Fatima. When she reached the level ground on the top, she turned again and repeated, "Well, my children, you will pass this on to my people."

Then, after a pause of a few seconds, our Lady looked to the south in the direction of Rome, "with an expression of indescribable sadness," as if in sympathy for all that her Son's vicars would suffer from then on.\*

"Motionless as statues," Maximin wrote later, "our eyes fixed on the beautiful lady, we saw her, with feet close together like those of a person skating, gliding over the top of the grass without causing it to bend. When we recovered from our rapture, we ran after her and soon overtook her. Melanie placed herself in front, and I behind a little to the right. Then, in our presence, she rose gradually, visible for some minutes between heaven and earth, at

\* On November 24, 1848, Pius IX was driven from Rome and took refuge in Gaeta. St. Pius X is generally considered to have died of a broken heart, sixteen days after the outbreak of World War I.

the height of two or three feet; then her head, her body and her feet became lost in the light which surrounded her. We could see nothing but a globe of fire rising and penetrating the firmament. In our simple language we called this globe a second sun. Our eyes remained long fixed on the spot where the luminous globe had disappeared. I cannot describe the ecstasy in which we found ourselves. I speak only for myself: I know very well that my whole being was overpowered; I was, as it were, paralyzed. When we came to ourselves again, we looked at one another without being able to utter a single word (cf. the children at Fatima in 1916 when they saw the angel). Sometimes we raised our eyes towards Heaven, sometimes looking on the ground around us. We seemed to be seeking the resplendent figure which, however, I have never since beheld. . . . My companion was the first to break silence, and said, 'It must be the good God, or my father's Blessed Virgin, or perhaps some great saint.'

"'Ah,' I replied, 'if I had known that, I would certainly have asked her to take me with her to Heaven.'"

The time had come to drive the cows back home. When they arrived at the village Maximin began to tell Madame Pra of the beautiful lady they had seen. "My expressions of a Lady in fire, a second sun, etc., made her think that I had gone mad. Nevertheless she begged me to tell her all that I had seen and heard, and she was much astonished at the recital. I, in turn, was astonished that she had not seen as well as I this brilliant light placed on top of the mountain, and consequently visible, as I supposed, to a very great distance. I could not imagine that I had received a special grace."

Then Maximin went home to the farmer for whom he worked and told him the same story.

Next morning the farmer took Maximin and Melanie to the parish priest. After hearing their story, the old pastor cross-questioned them closely and became convinced of its truth. He even went so far as to repeat much of it in the sermon at Mass that day, which was so contrary to the practice of the Church that he was soon reprimanded and removed. Only the bishop may pass on

these things, and that after a canonical commission has made a long and careful investigation, which usually takes many years.

A few people climbed up to the place of the apparition and found that there was not even a bush behind which a person could have been hiding, so that there was no possibility that some person had deceived the children. Moreover, they found that the spring, which had been dry up to that time, had burst into a full flood.

In the nearby township of Corps there was a lady suffering from an incurable disease. Her friends made a novena for her to Our Lady of La Salette, and on the ninth day she was given water from the spring to drink. She was instantly and permanently cured.

As the cures and the devotion multiplied, the bishop of Grenoble appointed two canonical commissions to work independently on the investigation. After they had reported that the events were well enough attested to warrant a full investigation, he appointed another commission, which not only examined the children and all the neighbors who could throw light on the subject, but also toured the nine surrounding dioceses to check on the reported miracles.

The warnings of the Queen of Prophets of a famine as a punishment on her rebellious people were literally fulfilled. She had spoken of the potato famine that had already begun. It spread far beyond France. In Ireland, in the winter of 1846, the potatoes turned bad with a "universal, infiltrating stench. This smell of the charnel house went far to induce many of the peasantry, and still more of their social superiors, to believe that they were confronted with no ordinary trouble, but with a visitation from on high, a scourge to punish the sins of the people." It was estimated that a million people died of famine in Ireland alone. The eve of the Annunciation, March 24, 1847, was proclaimed by Queen Victoria as a day of "general fast and humiliation before Almighty God, in order to obtain pardon for our sins, and that we may, in the most devout and solemn manner, send up our prayers to the Divine Majesty for the removal of those heavy judgments

which our manifold sins have justly deserved, and with which Almighty God is pleased to visit the iniquities of this land by a grievous scarcity and dearth of diverse articles of sustenance and necessities of life."

Two hundred thousand people in Scotland had to be fed by the state that winter. Nearly a fifth of Belgium was on charity. Food riots occurred in those countries and in France. Seventy-two thousand people died of starvation in France in 1854, and 80,000 died the following year. The grain harvest was bad also, as our Lady had warned.

Her warning about the children was also fulfilled. A great epidemic broke out in 1849. Here are the figures of the deaths, most of them children:

England and Wales	53,000
Ireland	30,000
France (1854)	150,000
All Europe	750,000

Our Lady foretold that the grapes would rot. The disease of phylloxera started in 1860. By 1905 it had laid waste practically every vineyard in France. Vines had to be imported from America and other places to replace them.

After a complete investigation, there seemed only one stumbling block — the secrets entrusted to Maximin and Melanie. To make sure that that part of the story was also true, and that nothing in the secrets contained anything contrary to faith and morals, the bishop sent for the children and pointed out that all visions and revelations should be fully and completely submitted to the Vicar of Christ, because it was for him to render final judgment on these matters. He put them under holy obedience to put in writing the secret that had been entrusted to them, and he had the letters sent, unopened, by a faithful messenger, to Pius IX.

When the Holy Father read Melanie's letter, his face seemed moved by great emotion. "These are scourges," he said, "with which France is threatened, but she is not alone and culpable. Germany and Italy, in fact all Europe, is culpable and merits

chastisements. I have less to fear from impiety than from indifference and human respect. . . . It is not without reason that the Church is called militant, and here (pointing to his breast) you behold its captain. I must read these letters more at leisure."

Years later Pius IX told the Superior General of the Missionaries of La Salette, "You want to know the secret of La Salette? It is this, 'Unless you do penance, you shall all perish'" (Lk. 13:3).

Finally, on September 19, 1851, on the fifth anniversary of the apparition, the bishop declared that, "considering, in the first place, that we are wholly unable to explain the fact of La Salette in any other way than as an act of the direct interference of Almighty God, whether we look at it in itself, in its circumstances or in its object, which is essentially religious; considering, in the second place, that the marvelous consequences which have flowed from this fact are the testimony of God Himself, given by means of miracles, and that this testimony is superior alike to the testimony and the objections of mere men; considering that either of these reasons, taken alone, and still more both together, ought to override all doubt and utterly destroy any weight which might at first sight seem to attach to the difficulties and objections which have been raised against it; considering, lastly, that a spirit of docility and submissiveness to the warnings of Heaven may preserve us, perhaps from those new chastisements with which we are threatened, while contrariwise a prolonged resistance may expose us to fresh and irremediable evils . . . having called on the Holy Spirit and implored the assistance of the pure and spotless Virgin, we decree: . . . the Apparition at La Salette is a true and certain fact . . . and that a church and house of refuge for pilgrims shall be immediately begun on the site of the Apparition."

The church was built, with its pilgrim hospices and statues at the places where our Lady and the children stood. Pope Pius IX raised the shrine to the dignity of a basilica and sent a special legate to crown the statue of Our Lady of Reconciliation of La Salette. Over five hundred confraternities of lay people throughout the world have been organized which are devoted to living

the message of our Lady: observing Sunday, keeping God's name holy, fasting, abstaining, and doing other acts of penance and working to promote Christ's kingdom on earth. The bishop of Grenoble founded the "Missionaries of La Salette" to "carry" her "message to all her people." By the centenary (1946) they had 635 priests, lay brothers and novices, spread over all the continents. When our Lady said "all my people" they took her literally.

Maximin and Melanie, meanwhile, had checkered careers. Their families were the poorest of the poor, and people of that Alpine section of France were notorious at that time for their indifference to religion. They were raised in almost utter ignorance, were of a very low grade of intelligence, and found it most difficult to learn the simplest prayers or lessons of any kind. Before the apparition, they had been also careless about their religious duties and disobedient. In spite of this, they repeated the very complicated message of our Lady, given in two languages, in exactly the same way each time they were asked. They never contradicted themselves, and the two stories agreed, in spite of the absence of any collusion between them. They were merely two people who happened to be thrown together at the time of the apparition, and they remained that way, never seeking each other's company to compare notes or for any other reason. They were subjected to hostile questioning that far surpasses any police third degree and can be compared only to Red brainwashing. Bribes of very large sums of money, such as poor children never knew existed, and the direst threats, even death, were used. All they were asked to do was to admit their story was false. They steadfastly resisted such promptings. For two young, ignorant peasant children to be suddenly shaken out of their peaceful life, constantly subjected to the most clever questioning by expert lawyers, canonists, theologians, doctors, bishops, and a host of strangers, would shake any story and send them into utter confusion and contradiction, even though they were reporting the simplest fact. This could be prevented only by a direct, miraculous intervention of God. Maximin and Melanie remained as stupid as they were before when it came to learning anything, but in answering the

grilling on the apparition, they parried the most clever thrusts of theologians with perfect ease and confounded all attempts to trap them into a false statement. This fact is, in the opinion of many, a greater miracle than the thousands of cures and conversions that have been reported at the shrine.

Melanie continued to be rather vain — she tried to become a nun, but could not get along in community life. Maximin went to the seminary at Grenoble, but the faculty found it hopeless to teach him even the most rudimentary things. He wandered from one occupation to another, moved about France, served in Rome as a Papal zouave, and then went to Paris. Although he never practiced heroic virtue, he was always a good Catholic and particularly had a horror of stories or actions against purity. He never married because he said that after seeing the dazzling beauty of our Lady he could not bring himself to look at another woman. He could not keep the simplest accounts in order, which is the reason why he could not hold many of his jobs.

In 1865, while in Paris, a local paper *La Vie Parisienne* published a story that he no longer believed in the Apparition of which he and his "sister" had claimed to be witnesses, and that he had been expelled from the seminary at Grenoble for holding heretical opinions.

This was the one thing in his life that he would fight for. He engaged a lawyer, who forced the paper to print a public retraction. But Maximin felt he owed our Lady more. So he wrote a 72-page booklet, "My Profession of Faith in the Apparition of La Salette." He related the event in detail, as he had done for twenty years, and then took up, one by one, and refuted the objections brought against it. Learned scholars and trained apologists could hardly have written a more masterful work. It was given the highest praise, fifty years later, by that famous theologian, Cardinal Billot, S.J.

When asked why he did not become a saint after having received such a tremendous grace, he answered that at least he was a good Catholic, and if it had not been for La Salette he would probably have been a very bad one. Whenever he was speaking

of or praying to our Lady, his whole being seemed completely transformed.

When he saw that his death was approaching, he made a farewell visit to La Salette. He put into his will this solemn declaration of faith and love: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

"I believe all that the Holy Roman Catholic Church teaches and all the dogmas defined by Our Holy Father the Pope, the august and infallible Pius IX.

"I firmly believe, even at the cost of my blood, in the celebrated Apparition of the Blessed Virgin on the holy mountain of La Salette, September 19, 1846; which Apparition I have defended by word, writing and suffering. After my death let no man pretend that I have retracted, or that he has heard me retract the great Event of La Salette, for, in deceiving himself, he would deceive the world.

"In these sentiments, I give my heart to Our Lady of La Salette."

(signed) Maximin Giraud.

There is only one serious objection that has ever been urged against La Salette: the reaction of the Curé of Ars.

St. Jean Vianney had been one of the first to believe in La Salette. He hailed it as a special message from heaven to a sinful world which would bring men back to God. He blessed many medals and pictures of the Apparition.

Then came complications. Followers of the Baron de Richeumont, who pretended to be Louis XVII of France, decided that the secrets entrusted to the children would establish the claim of the pretender to the throne. They managed to get Maximin out of the seminary at Grenoble and bring him to Lyons. They used every trick to worm the secret out of him but failed. Because of the fast growing interest in La Salette, it would be a tremendous help to their cause if they could get a statement from our Lady that the Baron was King of France!

Under the pretense that they were bringing him to the Curé

of Ars for light on his vocation to the priesthood, they took Maximin to see M. Vianney. Maximin was met first by Abbé Raymond, then acting as curate of Ars. He was a violent opponent of La Salette, and launched into a long and bitter tirade against Maximin and Melanie, calling them impostors and liars. He warned Maximin that it would be impossible to deceive the Curé, who could read the secrets of the heart.

Having stood it as long as he could, Maximin finally said in exasperation, "Well, have it then that I am a liar and have seen nothing!" and walked away. The curate immediately reported this to his pastor, and word spread like wildfire that Maximin had finally retracted what he had been maintaining for four years.

Next day, Maximin had two interviews with the Curé, after which M. Vianney refused to bless and distribute pictures and medals of La Salette.

The consensus of opinion now is that Maximin, who had a roguish streak in him, had "got his back up" from being bullied by the assistant and wanted to take his revenge. M. Raymond had defied him to deceive the Curé, so he accepted that challenge. In the presence of the future saint, he made believe that he had seen nothing on the mountain, knowing that the Curé, if he had the divine gift of reading all hearts, would know he was being deceived. And the Curé fell into the trap, taking the boy at his word. With that, satisfied that he had bested Abbé Raymond, Maximin returned to Lyons.

It is well to point out here that St. Vianney's gift of reading hearts was given for a purpose — to help him get people to make good confessions. It need not be extended to this matter, for Maximin had no intention of going to confession to the Curé.

When Maximin returned to the seminary, his conscience evidently troubled him, because he wrote a letter to the Curé of Ars saying that he had never retracted his story about the apparitions because it was the truth. When he was later grilled on the "retraction" he swore that he would maintain the truth of the story even on his deathbed. He said that he had been very careless in answering the Curé, and saying "yes" and "no" haphazardly.

The Curé himself remained tortured by doubts for years. Only in 1858, a year before his death, were his doubts resolved. He declared to Abbé Gerin of Grenoble ". . . I have much to tell you about Our Lady of La Salette. I could not explain to you the anxiety and torments my soul has passed through. I have suffered more than I can say. To give you an idea of these trials, imagine a man in a desert, in a whirlwind of sand and dust, not knowing where to turn. Finally in the midst of such restlessness and suffering, I cried out aloud: 'Credo' (I believe) and instantly found again that peace of mind, that calm, which I had absolutely lost. Now it would be impossible for me not to believe in La Salette. I have asked for signs in order to believe in La Salette, and I have obtained them. One may and must believe in La Salette."

This circumstance brought about by unscrupulous politicians who were trying to exploit the secret of La Salette to enthroned a pretender was the reason why the Bishop of Grenoble withheld his approbation of La Salette until the Holy Father had read the secrets himself. He felt that he had to make sure there was no possible stumbling block in the path of full approbation. Without revealing these secrets to anyone else, the Holy Father by not discouraging La Salette would satisfy the Bishop of Grenoble that he could approve the story with a clear conscience.

Maximin's words on returning to the seminary at Grenoble after his visit to Ars were like prophecy: "They now mock at La Salette; but it is like a flower which in winter they cover up with dirt and dung, but which in the summer springs from the earth more beautiful."

St. Vianney himself made an even more significant prediction. He told Father Archier, the first Superior General of the Missionaries of La Salette: "La Salette does much good, it will do much more; and after a while it will spread more and more. The Holy Virgin gave you a good work to begin; work always with courage. It will become great and one day your successors will have subjects in every part of the world."

So much for the story — what is the meaning of La Salette for us?

Although it happened over a century ago, no visit of our Lady, not even Fatima, is more fraught with lessons involving the welfare of the whole world than the "Marian gospel of La Salette." More clearly than anywhere else, our Lady brings home the one great lesson that the world has ignored: this world belongs to Him who made it, and famine, wars, and all other disasters happen only with His permission. They are usually a punishment to bring His rebellious people back to Him when he can bring them to their knees in no other way, even as He had to do with His stiff-necked people in the days of the Jewish prophets. As the bishop of Grenoble wrote in his pastoral letter of 1921:

"'Virtue exalts a nation, but sin is a people's disgrace' (Prov. 14:34). In so far as France lives and has regained her balance, her prosperity of old, it is because she has returned to God. Woe to us, if the terrible cataclysm into which we are in danger of falling, if the hard lesson which we have received should leave us the same as we were yesterday; if, in the face of the terrible reality which has come to pass, we do not know enough to realize that God is the Master of the destinies of individuals and of peoples; whoever wills to fight against Him exposes himself in advance to be broken and smashed to pieces like a potter's vessel:

'Why have the Gentiles raged,  
And the people devised vain things? . . .  
Thou . . . shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel'  
(Ps. 2:1, 9)."

The most significant words on La Salette have been wrung from the heart of that nation which was the first victim of World War II, and which has perhaps suffered far more, both from Germany and Russia, than any other nation. Cardinal Hlond, Primate of Poland, wrote on August 5, 1947:

" . . . We understand better today the advice, the threats and the promises of the Virgin in tears. We see them not only in relation to the situation of France in that epoch, but also (in relation to) the actual world which has cast itself into a desperate chaos.

"The appeal to penance of La Salette, of a hundred years ago,

is both severe and strengthening. It announces the chastisements to be endured by the transgressors of the divine Law, but it promises blessings to penitent converts. . . . Lourdes and Fatima are the confirmation and the complement of the message of Our Lady of La Salette.

"If we consider the present hour, La Salette appears as the ultimatum of divine Mercy and resounds through the world as the echo of the agonized threats of the Saviour, 'Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish!'

"By sinking more and more into moral disorder, the world is skirting the abyss. The revolt against the Creator and His Law has become a frenzy. There is no more place for God in the State and in the laws of the peoples. The present builders of the City consider the fight against God as a condition of progress and announce a new humanity. An insolent impiety, which is resolved to deliver the world to Satan, is promoted as an ideal and has become an obsession.

"The world is in danger of a catastrophe on the scale of the deluge of the Bible, and, the hour being as it is, the words of Our Lady have a sense of extreme gravity: *'If my people will not submit, I shall be forced to let go the arm of my Son; It is so strong and so heavy that I can no longer restrain It.'*

"It may be that soon the good God will come to reclaim His inalienable rights. With a thunderous shock, He will smash the infernal forces that have been unchained. The corrupted and revolted world will cringe under the lash of Divine anger. The domination of evil will be abated. Human hearts will submit themselves to the Majesty of Christ with love and abandon. Man reconciled to God will know anew the meaning of life, and of the royalty of Christ; he will learn again the happiness of peace.

". . . Would that the Virgin of La Salette would put us all in the ways of divine Mercy! Would that the war against God, the Redemption and the faith would come to an end! . . . Would that the devastation of the approaching storm would spare faithful and apostolic Poland! Would that every country, nestling in the

Immaculate Heart of its Queen, would escape the ruin and enjoy the divine blessing after the violence of the decisive combat!"

From the Eternal City, *Osservatore Romano* (April 14, 1954) verifies the Cardinal's prophetic remarks made seven years before: "Those very men who claimed themselves able and promised to prefabricate paradise on earth with the resources of science and technology in order to redeem man from a humiliating civilization of fear of God . . . now offer a scientifically and technically prefabricated hell (the H-bomb) in the proud civilization of fear."

Now that the terrible hydrogen bomb is with us, nobody would question the Cardinal's prophetic words, "a catastrophe on the scale of the flood of the Bible," which wiped out the whole human race except for one family.

As Archbishop Roncalli,\* nuncio to Paris, points out, "There is much work for peace . . . but there will never be peace between men without their reconciliation to God, and they cannot realize this without prayer and penance. So the Centenary Message of La Salette is more than ever a present reality."

The last word that could be said has been pronounced by the late Pope Pius XII. If anyone else had said it, it would be dismissed as the wild raving of a crackpot. But this was the solemn, public declaration of the Vicar of Christ. He felt that this was the least that the situation demanded:

"The human race today is involved in a supreme crisis which will end in its salvation by Christ, or in its dire destruction."†

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\* Elected Pope John XXIII, October 28, 1958.

† Pius XII: "Evangelii Praecones," 1951.

## CHAPTER IX . . . Lourdes

"I am the Immaculate Conception."

— OUR LADY at Lourdes, March 25, 1858

Lourdes in the High Pyrenees was a gateway to Spain. Situated at the mouth of the Seven Valleys of Lavedan, the castle fort on the mountaintop dominated the whole region. Before an invader could cross the Pyrenees, he had to take the castle. The ancient chronicles tell of Charlemagne's campaign against the Moors who had conquered Spain and were threatening France. In 778 he laid siege to the castle defended by Mirat, the Saracen chieftain. According to the story, an eagle perched on one of the towers and dropped a fish at Mirat's feet on a Friday, the day he knew that the Christians abstained from meat. Shortly afterward, we are told, he became instructed and was baptized in the faith. Whatever the facts were, the shield of Lourdes today shows an eagle perched on a tower with a fish in its mouth.

As the siege progressed, Mirat sought a means of surrendering without losing his honor. The bishop of Le Puy, who apparently had accompanied the troops of Charlemagne as a sort of chaplain, suggested that Mirat surrender to Our Lady of Le Puy, one of the oldest shrines of our Lady in France. He would then be surrendering, not to any mortal man, but to the Queen of Heaven. Mirat accepted, the siege was raised, and he departed with his people for Le Puy to render homage to our Lady. Whether this story about Mirat is true, there seems no way of determining at this date — "if it is not true, it's a good story anyhow." It is a way to account for the shield of Lourdes and the ancient connection between the two greatest shrines of our Lady in France — Le Puy-en-Velay and Lourdes-en-Bigorre.

Nearly three hundred years later, in 1062, Bernard I, count of Bigorre, in the region of Lourdes, made a pilgrimage to Le Puy, and publicly dedicated himself and his possessions to the Holy and Immaculate Virgin.

Eight hundred years later, in the time of Bernadette, Lourdes-en-Bigorre was still acknowledged as a fief of Le Puy-en-Velay. Every year a band of pilgrims would bring a feudal offering of herbs from the rock of Massabielle and lay them at the feet of Our Lady of Le Puy. Our Lady was known as the "Countess of Lourdes."

As long as the Bourbons ruled France, the white banner with the golden fleurs-de-lis was lowered every twenty-five years and the banner of our Lady floated over the castle for a whole day.

It is interesting to note another ancient custom: the watchman in the tower of the castle would announce the hour of midnight by crying out, "Awake, ye who sleep, and pray for the suffering souls in Purgatory."

But a new awakening was taking place in the world. The thousand and fourscore years had finally drawn to a close. The famine and disorder that swept Europe after La Salette were not enough to bring men to their knees. The *Communist Manifesto* found especially fertile ground with the oppressed peasants of Russia. Czar Alexander II ascended the throne of the Romanoffs. He was determined to bring more justice to his downtrodden people. In January, 1858, he formed the Committee of Emancipation, which was a sincere attempt to grant the peasants a Magna Charta, redress wrongs, safeguard liberties, and avert the bloody revolt that was impending. Being head of the Orthodox Church in his dominions, he was trying to bring about a real Christian reform. But this was too much for a blasphemous demagogue, Chernychevsky. A month later this man managed to split the committee into two warring factions and bring the reform to nothing.

So much for Marx and Chernychevsky, the dupes of Lucifer, and their rantings about class hatred. What about the little lady who crushed the serpent's head? Mary's answer to Lucifer's rant-

ings of class hatred was Lourdes, the greatest example of God's love for suffering humanity in modern times.

François and Louise Soubirous had little of the goods of this world, and seemed to care less. François was a miller who simply could not demand payment from his customers, and both he and his wife were so extravagant with what little they had that they were soon reduced to dire poverty. Finally the authorities of Lourdes allowed them and their six children to live in the "Chacot" — an old, pitiable jail cell which had been unused for years. Two beds, two old chairs, and some cheap crockery were all their possessions in this damp, dark hole. Marie-Bernard, known as Bernadette, was the eldest of the children. She was very frail, and not very bright. Although fourteen, she had not made her First Communion. The only prayers she knew were the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the prayer on the Miraculous Medal — "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee."

On Thursday, February 11, 1858, a bitterly cold day, Bernadette and her companions set out to gather wood. Finding that M. Lafitte had been cutting down trees in his field, they set out to gather branches. To get the wood, they had to wade the Gave and then enter the cave in the Old Rock, or "Massabielle." Leaving Bernadette on the opposite bank, they set off to gather waste and wood. While she was still thinking of wading in the icy water, she "heard a sound of wind like a storm."

"I turned to the meadow," she said in her account, "and I saw that the trees were not moving at all. I had half noticed, but without attending to it, that some branches were moving near the grotto. I went on taking my shoes off, and I was putting one foot into the water, when I heard the same sound in front of me. I lifted my eyes, and I saw a mass of branches and brambles tossed and waving this way and that, under the higher opening in the grotto, though nothing stirred all round. Behind these branches in the opening, I saw immediately afterwards a white girl, not bigger than I, who made me a little bow with her head. At the same time she put her hands out a little from beside her

body — her arms were hanging down like (the picture of) Our Lady. A rosary was hanging on her right arm. I was frightened. I stepped back. I wanted to call the two little ones, but I dared not. I rubbed my eyes again and again: I thought I must be mistaken. Looking up, I saw the girl smiling very sweetly at me. She seemed to be inviting me to approach, but I was still frightened. All the same, it was not a fear like what I have felt at other times, because I would always have stayed to look at that, but when one is frightened one goes away quickly. Then I thought of saying my prayers; I put my hand in my pocket and took out the rosary that I always carry in it; I knelt down and meant to make the sign of the cross; but I could not put my hand to my forehead — it fell back. Meanwhile, the girl put herself sideways and turned towards me; this time she was holding the big rosary in her hand. She crossed herself, as though to pray. My hand was trembling; I tried again to make the sign of the cross, and this time I could. After this I was no longer frightened. I said my rosary. The girl made the beads of hers slip (through her fingers) but she did not move her lips.

"While I was saying my rosary, I was looking as hard as I could. She was wearing a white dress, hanging down to the feet, of which only the tips appeared. The dress was fastened quite high up, round the neck, by a fold from which a white cord was hanging. A white veil, covering the head, went down over the shoulders and the arms, almost to the bottom of the dress. On each foot I saw a yellow rose. The sash of the dress was blue, with its ends hanging down to her feet. The chain of the rosary was yellow; the beads white, large and widely separated. The girl was alive, very young and surrounded with light. When I had finished my rosary, she bowed to me, smiling, retired into the niche, and disappeared all of a sudden."

On the way home Bernadette told her companions what she had seen, but swore them to secrecy. Naturally, the little girls could not keep such a thing quiet. They told Madame Soubirous. When she heard it, she told Bernadette, "You think you saw

something, but you saw nothing." In order to convince the little girl that there was nothing to it, she would allow her to return to the grotto on the following Sunday.

After Mass on Sunday, the girls asked Bernadette to go back to the grotto. Her father at first refused permission, but was persuaded to consent by M. Cazenave, the innkeeper. "Let the little ones do as they like. A lady with a rosary — there is no harm in that." But before going, they took the precaution of bringing a bottle of holy water. When they arrived at the grotto, they knelt down and said the rosary. At the third decade, "the same white girl showed herself in the same place as before." Bernadette went on, "I said, 'there she is,' and put my arm around the neck of one of them, and pointed to the white girl, but she saw nothing." Then Bernadette went forward a little and threw holy water at the Vision. The Vision smiled, bowed her head, and made the sign of the cross. Bernadette said, "If you come from God, come nearer." The Vision advanced a little. One of the girls, Jeanne Abadie, shouted, "Ask her if she comes from God or the devil," and threw a stone at it. The Vision disappeared, but reappeared to Bernadette almost immediately. When the girls tried to drag Bernadette away from the place, they could not move her. Then they ran for Madame Soubirous and some other women for help. They, in turn, brought Nicolau, the miller. They found the girl kneeling, very pale, with her eyes wide open, her hands joined with her rosary between them. "Tears were running from both her eyes," said the miller. "She was smiling, and her face was beautiful, more beautiful than anything I have ever seen. It hurt me and it made me happy . . . all day long it touched my heart to think of it." Finally they managed to drag her away from the place.

When she came out of the ecstasy, she described what she had seen. It was not something ugly, but "A lady in white. She is very beautiful. She has a rosary on her arm. She has her hands like that," and pressed her hands together. They then brought her home.

None of the relatives or the nuns would believe the story, but

some of the neighbors thought it was a girl who had recently died, Elisa Latapie, who had been president of the Children of Mary, and who had been buried in a white dress like that described on the Vision.

Very early Thursday morning, Madame Millet took pen and ink and a blessed candle, and with a party of women brought Bernadette again to the grotto. Arriving at the top of the rock of Massabielle, Bernadette disappeared down the path "like a flash of lightning," although the others had to descend the steep path by grabbing handholds and descending with great difficulty. The child knelt down and all said the rosary. Soon she announced, "There she is." One of the girls gave Bernadette the pen and ink and some paper, and said, "Go and ask the lady what she wants, and to write it down." Bernadette advanced into the grotto. When the women rose to follow her, she motioned them back. Then she said to the Vision, "If you come from God, please tell me what you want; else go away." At the first words, the lady smiled pleasantly, but "after the last words, her face clouded over, and she shook her head." Then Bernadette said, "Please have the goodness to give me your name and what you want, in writing." For the first time the lady spoke, using the Bearnaisse patois, "There is no need to write what I have to say," and then laughed. This little touch, showing our Lady's sense of humor, is delightful. In a later vision she smiled in amusement when a woman brought out her glasses, hoping to see the vision with their help.

The bystanders then told Bernadette, "Ask her if we can come back." The Vision answered, "*Nothing need prevent their return,*" and then went on, "*Will you do me the kindness of coming here for a fortnight?*" Bernadette answered that she would come if she could get permission. The Vision then said, "*I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the other.*" Then she disappeared.

Bernadette described the Vision as quite alive, looking this way and that, with her eyes resting kindly on Antoinette Peyret, a Child of Mary.

The Soubirous family, after a long discussion, decided that

Bernadette should be taken to the grotto for a fortnight, but very early, so that the neighbors would not become involved. On Friday, February 19, five or six women took the child to the top of the rock. Bernadette "left us and flew down to the river," said her aunt. "One could hardly follow her." They described her as "going like a swallow," as "taking wings," while they toiled painfully down the cliff. She knelt at her usual place, with a burning candle in her hand. Nothing was said, but Bernadette made large signs of the cross, "as if she had never learned anything else but learn how to."

On Sunday, the 21st, a large crowd came with Bernadette to the grotto, among them Dr. Dozous. In the fashion of the times, particularly with medics, the good doctor was a skeptic. When Bernadette fell into ecstasy, he took her pulse and noted her breathing, which were perfectly normal. When he released her wrist, she moved up closer to the niche where the Vision was standing. "You will pray to God for sinners," said the Lady.

In spite of rising opposition from the civil authorities, Bernadette was faithful to her rendezvous. The civil authorities became aroused — they were always afraid of crowds in those uneasy times. Bernadette was forbidden to return to the grotto. On Monday she went to school. After dinner, when she came back to school, she felt drawn to the grotto "by an irresistible impulse." She started off, with a policeman on either side of her, and a gathering crowd following. "Are we really asked to believe this superstition in the nineteenth century?" they asked.

She knelt down, but saw nothing that day, probably because she had gone there with a divided conscience. She had been told by her father to obey the order of M. Jacomet, the commissioner of indirect taxation. Our Lady wished to remind Bernadette of her duty to obey her parents. Abbé Pomian, assistant priest at the parish and Bernadette's confessor, was consulted. He decided that since it was not the chief authority, M. Dutour, who had forbidden her to go, she should not be stopped. Besides, he felt that no one had the right to stop her from going to the grotto. So the parents gave permission.

On Tuesday, February 23, a number of very skeptical citizens went early to the grotto. They examined the area very thoroughly and then launched into a long discussion of the events. When Bernadette arrived she was greeted with a hubbub of talk. They fell silent when she knelt and went into ecstasy, which lasted for an hour. Most of those present, after looking at the girl's face transfigured, became convinced "it was not just grimaces."

The visit of February 25 was, in a way, the most important of all because of what has been happening ever since. Bernadette was told by the Lady, "*Go, drink at the source (spring) and wash in it.*" Not knowing that there was a spring in the grotto, she started toward the Gave. But the Lady corrected her and pointed with her finger to a spot on the floor of the grotto. "I went there. I only saw a little dirty water. I put my hand in, but could not take any. I scratched and water came, but muddy. Three times I threw it away, but the fourth time I could drink it." She again stooped and ate a little of the bright green tuft that grew there. A Mlle. Lacrampe, who had come under protest, now announced to the Estrades, "You would have done better not to have made me come. I didn't believe much before, now I don't believe at all." Most of the crowd, when they saw the girl with her face all dirty, drinking muddy water and eating wild herbs, decided that she was mad. They were to recall later that it was the First Friday of Lent, when the Gospel told of the spring of Probatica to which so many of the "sick and the blind and the lame" came and were healed.

By that afternoon the rivulet was pouring 27,000 gallons of water into the Gave, as it has done to this day.

It is well to notice an old custom of the Middle Ages: soldiers going into battle who could not receive Holy Communion would confess their sins to a comrade and then eat a blade or two of grass. Although Bernadette seems to have known nothing of this old custom, it throws her action in a different light. It should also be remembered that the herbs brought each year by pilgrims to Our Lady of Le Puy, Grande Chatelaine of Lourdes, were gathered at this very spot.

On March 2, our Lady told her to go to the priests and tell them that she wished to have a chapel built. When she told this to the curé, Abbé Peyramale, he said only, "I am told you are eating grass in the grotto. So you are behaving like an animal!" He had forbidden any of his four curates to attend the "carnival apparition" and threatened to have Bernadette put in prison. The curé was a sturdy old peasant, of sound sense and absolute truthfulness. The whole parish worshiped him although they feared his anger when he was disobeyed.

Certainly it could not be said that the clergy engineered the whole story. They were much harder to convince than even the civil authorities.

About this time the first miracle occurred: Louis Bourriette, a cart maker who had lost the sight of an eye in an accident, bathed the injured area in water of the spring and instantly regained his sight. Now nothing could hold back the interest of the people.

On March 3, about four thousand people came to the grotto. Our Lady did not appear to Bernadette when she came early in the morning. Later, after the people had gone away disappointed, Bernadette came back alone. When our Lady appeared to her she said, *"You did not see me this morning because there were persons there who had come to see what your face was like in my presence, and who are unworthy of that, because they passed the night in the grotto and dishonored it."* The townspeople had said the same thing, saying that they did not expect "the Lady" to return to the grotto because of the scandals committed there. When Bernadette told "the Lady" that the curé wanted a miracle, "the Lady" smiled. She smiled again when the little girl mentioned how she had been telling the people not to disturb the rosebush on which our Lady was standing, fearing she would be deprived of a place on which to stand.

On March 4, the crowd had swelled to about twenty thousand people. Gendarmes in uniform had searched the grotto minutely the night before at 11, and again at 4 in the morning. They managed to keep fairly good order, and even prevented souvenir

hunters from chipping away pieces of the old jail where the Soubirous lived. Bernadette repeated the curé's request for a miracle, for he could not be expected to build a chapel until she told who she was. When Bernadette reported again to Abbé Peyramale she told him that the fortnight was now up, but that "the Lady" had not said good-by and that she intended to visit the place again.

She did not go back for the next three weeks, but crowds continued to increase. A number of cures were reported, but not verified, of course. People came and drank and bathed in the spring, lighted candles and said prayers there, to the mounting nervousness of Baron Massy, prefect of Tarbes, and the Ministry of Public Worship in Paris. The Baron admitted that Bernadette had refused any money; but he said she was the victim of a hallucination. He praised the correct attitude of the clergy, who refused to admit anything supernatural.

As the feast of the Annunciation drew near, the crowds became convinced that "the Lady" would come and announce herself to Bernadette that day. Crowds came from all the surrounding countryside. They decorated the grotto with flowers and candles. An air of expectancy hung about the Old Rocks of Massabielle.

Before 4 a.m. Bernadette woke her parents and said she would like to visit the grotto. After some pleading, they consented, in spite of the cold she had caught. For the first time, she found "the Lady" waiting for her. The Vision came to the lower part of the grotto and looked with pleasure on the offerings of gratitude, and the decorations. After some time in ecstasy, Bernadette asked, "Madame, will you have the goodness to tell me who you are?" At first the Lady only smiled, but after the third request, she parted her hands, which had been joined, and let them fall to her side in the attitude of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. She then joined them again on her breast, raised her eyes, but not her head, toward Heaven and said, "*I am the Immaculate Conception.*"

When Bernadette came out of her ecstasy, she began to laugh and her face remained radiant as it had been during the apparition. She told her friend Ursule Nicolau, "She said to me, 'I am

the Immaculate Conception.’’ All the way home she kept repeating the words. She knew that ‘‘the Immaculate Conception’’ had something to do with our Lady, but did not understand what it meant. She told her confessor, Abbé Pomian, and he told the curé.

The announcement of our Lady was the occasion for the learned doctors of the Law to stroke their beards and argue how our Lady could appropriate to herself an abstract name, but there was no longer any doubt about who the Lady was. Pope Pius IX had defined the Immaculate Conception as a dogma of the faith only four years before.

On April 7 our Lady appeared again to Bernadette. On this occasion she happened to hold her hand too close to the taper she was carrying in the other hand. Because of her ecstasy, she felt no pain. Afterward, Dr. Dozous placed the flame of a candle near her hand and she drew it back with an expression of pain, crying, ‘‘You are burning me!’’

The last visit was on July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. By this time the grotto had been boarded up to keep the crowds out. Although Bernadette had to stay on the opposite bank of the river, our Lady seemed as close as if the little girl were in the grotto, and the boards seemed to disappear. Bernadette declared later when she was a nun at Nevers that she never saw our Lady again on earth.

As at many other visits she made, our Lady told the visionary some things which she was to keep entirely to herself. People tried every means to drag the secret out of her. Probably thinking of La Salette, they asked, ‘‘Would you tell your secret to the Pope?’’ She answered, ‘‘The Blessed Virgin said, ‘Tell it to no one.’ The Pope is someone.’’ When they pointed out that the Pope acts with the power of Jesus Christ, she answered, ‘‘The Pope is powerful on earth, but Our Lady is in Heaven.’’ The best explanation seems to be that these secrets were probably prophecies of a personal nature that the visionaries could verify in their lifetime in order to strengthen them against the terrible grueling to which they were invariably subjected. Even the Red brainwashing

in some cases was not as severe as the lifelong mental racking to which the children of La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima, and many other places, were subjected. It is notable that never once did any of them break down.

The civil authorities now felt they had to take action. Ever increasing crowds were coming to the grotto, and many were claiming cures. After a preliminary analysis, it was felt that the cures could be explained by calling the water of Massabielle a "medicinal spring." Later M. Fihol of Toulouse, an outstanding man in his field, was engaged. After a most thorough examination, he gave the components of the water and then added that the water was fit for drinking but "contained no active substance capable of giving it marked therapeutic properties." Fulton Oursler tells the story:\*

"The attendant took me inside where there was no patient present and showed me a sunken tub, filled with dark malodorous water.

"Here the patient is brought with his volunteer assistant. Here he is stripped and immersed. The water is not changed after each patient; in fact it is not changed for the whole day. Scores of persons, sick with syphilis, cancer, etc. — are immersed in the same bath water. When I saw the water it was dark as ink.

"You feel you would like to see a miracle, I suppose?" asked my guide. "Well then, here is one for you!"

He leaned over, amazingly spry for a man of such great age — he must have been over eighty. He dipped an aluminum cup down in the bath water, filled it and started to drink it down, the whole cupful. I seized his arm and stopped him. . . .

He said, "I have drunk a whole hospital full of microbes, I have done it for every skeptic I brought here, yet I have never once been sick. . . . The hostile doctors . . . made a chemical analysis of the water in the bath at the close of a day. Oh, yes — they found bacilli. Billions! But they were *inert*."

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\* From *The Happy Grotto* by Fulton Oursler, copyright 1949 by Fulton Oursler, pp. 74-75. Used by permission of the publisher, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, Inc.

As the crowds grew, and as claims of miraculous cures multiplied, the civil authorities felt that they had to take action. Maybe some demagogue could stir up the large crowds to march against the government. Any bureaucrat would take a very dim view of the situation. The one thing on which all officials agreed was that there was no truth in Bernadette's story. Dr. Dozous, the only doctor who had been present at the apparitions, was not allowed to attend the consultations of the officials because he believed her.

After long discussion it was decided to dismantle the shrine that had been erected, and board up the grotto. After great difficulty, Baron Massy, the Prefect of Tarbes, obtained a cart with which he carried away some of the statues and ex-votos, telling the townspeople that they could come and claim what was theirs. All of Lourdes came en masse to the grotto, took away everything, and then brought it all back, so that the place was ablaze with candles that night.

Opposition mounted, and there was danger of an outright clash between the men of the town and the police who were set as guards to keep people out of the grotto. Finally the curé himself stepped in. He told his people at Mass the next Sunday, "You will have to deal with me henceforward, not the police. I shall station myself on the road to the grotto—I fear no hammer or crowbar. If you come en masse, you will have to trample me underfoot, and know yourselves for cowards; if you come one by one, well, the first comer who begins a fight with me—I warn him it will not be he who wins." The people had too much respect for the rugged honesty of their curé, and peace was re-established.

After some months, the Emperor himself stepped into the picture. He was vacationing at Biarritz nearby, and the people of Lourdes sent him a delegation asking that the grotto be opened. In their very presence, he telegraphed Baron Massy to reopen the grotto and offer no further interference.

It was not so simple to get recognition from the Church. The Bishop of Tarbes appointed a commission which spent four years making a complete study of everything connected with Bernadette's story, as well as the cures claimed. In 1862 the bishop de-

clared that our Immaculate Mother had really appeared to Bernadette in the grotto at Massabielle.

Not only did our Lady get the chapel she asked for, she got four. The grotto itself became the lower church, and a magnificent basilica was built atop the rock. Then the "Rosary chapel" was built in front of and below the upper church, with a large square before it which has often accommodated 100,000 people hearing Mass at one time. The great underground basilica of St. Pius X is the fourth.

For every person cured — every "miracle" — there are hundreds of sick all earnestly begging for a cure who return home just as sick as they came. But there is a vast change that has come over them — they are resigned to their suffering. They accept it as a cross sent them from God to atone for their sins and the sins of others. The grace of Lourdes is the grace of resignation.

Bernadette was sent to the Sisters of Charity at Nevers, where she became a nun. She spent the rest of her life as assistant infirmarian, taking care of the sick, and as sacristan. Her life was as quiet and peaceful as the world of bishops, priests, and people would let it be. There was a constant stream of visitors asking her questions. She never again saw her beloved grotto, and our Lady's words were literally fulfilled, "*I do not promise you happiness in this life, but in the next.*"

She suffered from asthma all her life, but the mental torture she underwent in answering all the tiresome questions was far greater. When asked why she did not take an active part in the ceremonies at Lourdes, which soon became the greatest shrine in the world, she answered, "What do you do with a broom when you have finished sweeping? You put it away behind the door. So it is with me. Our Lady had a use for me. Now it is finished. So I wait quietly in a corner."

Bernadette died on April 16, 1879, with these words on her lips, "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner and now at the hour of my death." Years later her body was exhumed and found incorrupt. It now rests in a glass case in the chapel at Nevers, forming an altar. The expression of peace on her angelic

face is wonderful to behold. She was declared a saint by Pius XI on December 8, 1933, and her feast was set for February 19—eight days after the feast of the first apparition of our Lady at Lourdes.

Although our Lady never said anything to Bernadette about miraculous cures, thousands have been claimed in the past century, and many have been attested by the Medical Commission. This bureau of doctors and scientists, like the Congregation of Rites, when considering miracles attributed to candidates for canonization, demands ironclad proof of the facts. Moreover, the cures claimed must be clearly beyond the power of any natural course. In addition, the cures must be instantaneous and permanent.

Nothing exasperated the "modern" mind of nineteenth-century Europe like this. In spite of the determined opposition of Abbé Peyramale and the Bishop of Tarbes to the claims at Lourdes, the "liberals" cried "superstition" and "medievalism." After frantically casting about for every possible explanation—"mass hysteria"—and the rest, they were finally forced to admit that it was entirely beyond them.

But Lourdes is not just a miracle factory. Our Lady cures bodies so that she can cure souls. Nobody knows better than she that any physical cure is just a temporary measure. That diseased piece of flesh will soon again rot away until it is no longer a fit dwelling place for the soul, and that soul will leave it. That flesh will return to the dust from whence it came, but the soul will enter upon eternal joy or eternal misery. This is what really concerns our Mother.

"...Lourdes has simply planted the banner of supernatural and of holiness — of supernatural holiness — in our modern earth. It has proclaimed an entirely different *order* of existence, and in that order Mary, conceived immaculate, is as it were the perfect unsurpassable example, the peak, the exact reproduction of God's idea. Need we after all find: 'I am the Immaculate Conception' to be so strange an expression? Must we think that it would have been impossible for Our Lord to say 'I am the Incarnation'? After all, He did say, 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' God's

thought is substantial in Him. God's vision of humanity 'full of grace' is realized in Mary. She is what the bitterly jealous world, the indignant, humiliated, self-worshipping world simply will not admit. And, despite the collapse of the old materialism, the divine proclamation is still necessary — perhaps almost more so, since disillusionment has followed the self-satisfaction . . . little can be made of despair. Still, if it be not *quite* despairing human nature may yet again turn its eyes towards the Hills whence along cometh its help, and, amid the Pyrenean rocks, catch sight of what God meant it to be and towards which He is as willing as ever to help it to move.

" . . . within the Grotto — especially at night when there is no sound save the rush of the river and the softly falling flakes of melted wax — you can recapture at once the grandeur and the childlikeness of that Apparition, its sublimity and simplicity, its power of introducing human nature, without shock or scare, into its own world of holiness which is the very vestibule of heaven."\*

Just about the time Lucifer thought he had the whole world in thrall, the little Lady stepped on his head again and ground him into the dirt of Massabielle. All hell has been roaring about Lourdes ever since. The fiends claim it is unfair competition to bring heaven right down on earth!

"The healings of the body, mind and soul in that Grotto remain like a lighthouse in the darkness of the world of disbelief. The light was set there by a tubercular little girl who had never been to school. Clearly rebuking the rationalists and philosophers, and to strengthen faith in its century of trial, God did in Lourdes what long ago He did in Galilee: He set among them a little child and reminded them that as such is the kingdom of Heaven."†

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\* From *Our Blessed Lady: Sermons* by C. C. Martindale, S.J. (1950), published by Sheed and Ward, Inc., in *The Mary Book*, New York, pp. 299, 300.

† Fulton Oursler, *The Happy Grotto*, p. 79.

## CHAPTER X . . . Pontmain, 1871

"Mother of Hope

Whose name is so sweet,

Protect our France

And pray for us." — *Hymn of Pontmain*

Of all the shrines of our Lady in France, Pontmain was born out of an imminent international crisis. Each of the other nineteenth-century shrines came as the answer to a national need — Rue du Bac, La Salette, and Lourdes, but Pontmain came into existence in the very throes of the Franco-Prussian war. It became known as the Shrine of Our Lady of Hope.

In ancient days, Pontmain was one of the most strongly fortified towns in France, until the English Earl of Arundel captured and razed it in 1432. To do a thorough job, he massacred practically all the inhabitants, thereby earning for himself the hated title of "Scourge of La-Maine."

For the next 440 years the simple peasants went about their work in the fields like ordinary people all over the world. In 1840 the town was given a resident parish priest, Abbé Michael Guerin. The good pastor became known far and wide for his intense devotion to our Lady and his complete confidence in her protection. It is generally believed that what happened in 1871 was a reward for his devotion.

France had blundered into war with Prussia. Napoleon III confidently rode out with his troops to meet Bismarck's men at Sedan on September 1, 1870, and lost the war in two days. Nearly one hundred and twenty thousand men were lost, the Emperor was a prisoner, France's only other army was locked up in Metz, and the Prussians rushed on to besiege Paris. Never in history was

there a more astounding, sudden, and complete collapse of a major power. The terrible year of 1871 predicted by our Lady at Rue du Bac in Paris forty-one years before had suddenly come upon France.

Paris fell and the Prussian tide swept west. They won the battle of Le Mans and the road was open to Brittany all the way to Cape Finisterre.

The Barbedette family in Pontmain consisted of the father, mother, and three boys. Auguste, the eldest, had gone off to join a regiment of mobiles. Eugene was twelve, and Joseph was ten.

They were all faithful to their duties as Christians, and were constantly praying for France and for the boys at the front. At the urging of the pastor, they added acts of penance to their prayers to God and to our Lady. Abbé Guerin simply refused to admit that Mary would fail them in their hour of need.

On the evening of January 17, 1871, Eugene was working with his father in the barn, preparing the fodder for the cattle for the next day. A neighbor, Jeanette Detais had just come over to reassure the family about their eldest son. After a while Eugene looked out the door to see what the weather was like. Although the stars were shining brightly on the cold, glittering scene of snow and ice, there seemed to be a blank space over the house next door. Soon there appeared to him a beautiful woman, smiling at him. As he was staring, Jeanette came to leave. "Look, Jeanette, there above Augustin Guidecq's. Tell me what you see," he asked her.

"No, Eugene, I can see nothing."

The others came to the door. The father could see nothing, but Joseph said, "Yes! A tall, beautiful Lady!" On further questioning, Joseph said, "I see a tall, beautiful Lady in a blue dress covered with stars. She has blue shoes with gold buckles."

The father grew impatient. "My poor boys, you see nothing; for if you saw anything, I would see it too. Now come and finish grinding the fodder. Supper will soon be ready." And he warned Jeanette not to tell anyone in the village about his boys claiming to have seen an apparition.

They returned to their work, but had hardly started when the father said, "Eugene, go to the door and see if your Apparition is still there."

When he went, he said, "Yes, yes, Father! It is the very same."

"Well, go and tell your mother that I wish to see her for a few moments."

When the mother came, she could see nothing. But she knew the boys were not given to deception, and there was such an air of sincerity about their voices, that she said,

"Perhaps after all you see the Blessed Virgin; so let us kneel down and recite five Paters and Aves in her honor." Closing the barn door, they said their Paters and Aves. Then she told the children to look again and see if the vision was still there. When the boys went to look, they said, "Just the same, Mother! Just the same!"

The good mother got her glasses and looked again, but could see nothing. Then she took the same attitude as her husband. "I don't see anything, and you do not either. You are just little visionaries. Come to supper."

Hardly was supper finished than they asked permission to return to the barn.

"Go," said the mother, "but if you see anything, say five Paters and five Aves, but say them standing; it is too cold to kneel down."

Hardly had they opened the barn door before they fell involuntarily on their knees. The parents joined them and asked them how tall the Lady was.

"Just the height of Sister Vitaline," they both answered together.

Madame Barbedette then announced that she would go and get the sister, "For they are better than you, and if you see anything she will surely see it too."

The woman's logic broke on the facts, because when the sister came she could see nothing either.

"How is it possible that you don't see?" exclaimed Eugene. "The Apparition is so splendidly brilliant. Don't you see those three bright stars forming a triangle?"

"Yes," said the nun, "I see them." But that was all that she

could see. (For many days later they were to return to the same spot and look for those stars, but they never saw them again. It turned out that they were not a part of the constellation "the Plough.")

Suddenly an idea struck the good sister. When she returned to school she sent three little girls who were boarders at the school to see Madame Barbedette. She did not tell them the purpose of the mission, but simply told them to report to Madame.

Before they reached Barbedette's, Françoise Richer exclaimed, "I see something bright, right above Augustin Guidecoq's house."

When they came closer, two of the three little girls exclaimed, "O the beautiful Lady, with her blue dress and golden stars!" The third little girl saw nothing, but the other two described the vision exactly as the two boys did.

By this time Sister Vitaline had returned, accompanied by Sister Mary Edward.

"It is the children who are privileged to see, so we must send some more little ones."

On the way to bring more children, they passed the house of the curé.

"M. le Curé," they said, "the children say they see the Blessed Virgin!"

"An Apparition! The Blessed Virgin! Sister, you frighten me."

By the time the curé arrived on the scene, practically the whole village was gathered. Such news travels almost instantaneously in a small town.

Although the curé could see only the three stars, he felt sure that there was no hysteria or hallucination involved, because all the children reported the same thing. He stood quietly in the background as they went on to describe what they saw.

All of the sixty people saw the three bright stars, but only the children saw the vision.

A red cross then appeared on the Lady's breast, and she was surrounded by a deep blue oval.

The people began to argue about what the children thought they saw, and the children said that our Lady began to grow sad.

The curé had the people say the rosary. They knelt down and did not seem to mind the intense cold. Meanwhile three children continued to gaze, entranced.

The Virgin seemed to grow taller, and the stars seemed to multiply. "There are so many stars the Blessed Virgin will soon be gilt all over," they said. They reported that the Blessed Virgin appeared exactly as a living human being. Occasionally, when she smiled, she would show dazzling, pearly teeth.

When the sisters began the *Magnificat*, a scroll unfolded under her feet with the words, "But pray, my children."

Hardly had this been announced, when a villager who had just come from a neighboring town, said,

"Oh, you do well to pray to the good God! The Prussians are at Laval."

"If they were at the entrance of the village," some answered, "we would have no fear now!"

The curé then suggested the Litany of Loretto, and told the children to ask her to tell what she willed.

The next line on the scroll was,

"God will hear you in a little while," and later,  
"My Son permits Himself to be moved."

They had no doubt now that it was really the Blessed Virgin. The curé then directed that they sing their favorite hymn,

"Mother of Hope,  
Whose name is so sweet,  
Protect our France  
And pray for us."

As they sang our Lady smiled at the children, raised her hands level with her shoulders, and seemed to be keeping time with her fingers with the music.

After this the children exclaimed:

"There is something being prepared now!"

Our Lady lowered her hands, smiling more radiantly than before, and then, appearing very sad, clasped a red crucifix which ap-

peared. The crucifix seemed about twenty-four inches high, on which was the figure of the Saviour, also in red. Above the crossbar was another bar bearing the words "Jesus Christ."

Four small candles appeared within the blue oval, and as the crowd sang *Parce Domine* ("Spare Thy people, O Lord") the candles lit up and the crucifix faded, while two other crosses appeared above our Lady's shoulders. Finally her sad expression changed into a smile, and she extended her hands in the posture of the Miraculous Medal.

Now a white cloud could be seen by all the others, as well as the children, which gradually began to blot out the three stars framing the vision. The vision faded away. First the feet, then the body, and finally the head disappeared.

General Schmidt announced that same evening, "My troops enter Laval tonight." A few hours later, at the very time of the apparition, he was handed an unexpected order forbidding him to enter Laval. On the next day the Prussians began to withdraw. Also at the time of the apparition, a novena for peace was being finished at Our Lady of Victories in Paris. A golden heart was promised for her shrine there as a thanksgiving offering if peace were restored.

Eleven days later the armistice was signed. All Catholic France accepted it as the result of our Lady's intervention at Pontmain.

A number of miraculous cures were reported — notably to M. du Tertre, in whose field the vision occurred. He had presented his field to the church, feeling that our Lady had marked the place as her own. (A magnificent basilica now stands there.) In 1875 he was at death's door, having been given up by his doctors. When he was brought to the spot of the apparitions, and after spending a night in prayer, he was completely cured.

On the first anniversary of the apparition, January 17, 1872, France made a great solemn pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Pontmain.

After a searching examination, Msgr. Wicart, bishop of Laval, solemnly decreed on February 2, 1872: "That the Immaculate

Virgin Mary, Mother of God, really appeared on January 17, 1871, to Eugene and Joseph Barbedette, François Richer, and Jeanne-Marie Lebosse in the hamlet of Pontmain. In all humility we submit this our decision to the judgment of the Holy See.

"We authorize in our diocese devotion to the Blessed Virgin under the title of that of Notre Dame d'Esperance ("Our Lady of Hope") of Pontmain."

Pius IX gave permission to say the Mass of the Immaculate Conception at Pontmain in 1877. In 1919, Cardinal Dubois asked for the privilege of a special Mass and office for Our Lady of Pontmain, although three of the voyants were still living. Pope Benedict XV directed a new and very severe inquiry. Although he died before it was finished, Pius XI granted the request in full. This is perhaps the only case where two visionaries who had become priests read the story of their vision in the lessons of the Office.

In March, 1944, three months before "D Day," the Catholics of France renewed their vows to Our Lady of Pontmain, asking deliverance from the German occupation. Two years later, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the apparition, a grateful France led by the Papal Nuncio, the hierarchy, and a vast throng of people gathered again to thank their protectress for this latest deliverance. One might say that Lourdes is the international, but Pontmain is France's national shrine.

John Beevers, in his book *The Sun Her Mantle*, points out that "The Cross of Pontmain is Our Lady's reminder to suffering France that the cross of military defeat must be accepted. But it is more than that. It is her testimony that the Cross of Christ is the pivot of the universe and that, 'go where thou wilt, seek what thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the Holy Cross. In the Cross is salvation, in the Cross is Life, in the Cross is the height of virtue, in the Cross is the perfection of sanctity. There is no health of the soul, nor hope of eternal life, but in the Cross.'

"Prayer and the Cross: that is what Our Lady urges on us at

Pontmain. Performance of One and contemplation of the other so short a lesson and yet so complete."\*

As atomic clouds thicken around us, we grasp more firmly the cross of Jesus Christ and we are spurred on to more prayer by the encouraging words of Our Lady at Pontmain, "My Son permits Himself to be moved."

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\* John Beevers, *The Sun Her Mantle* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1953), pp. 211-212. By permission of the publisher.

## CHAPTER XI . . . Knock, 1879

"Jesus Son of the Virgin, Mary Mother of God."  
— Preaching of St. PATRICK

When St. Patrick lit the paschal fire on the hill of Slane in A.D. 432, the Catholic world was singing with joy — "Mary is the Mother of God." The age-old belief of the Catholic world had been vindicated and defined against the heretical patriarch of Constantinople. Pope St. Celestine, who had sent St. Patrick to Ireland, had convened the third great council of the Church at Ephesus, where our Lady was said to have spent her last years with St. John the Evangelist, and was taken up into heaven. Under the leadership of St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria, the bishops of the whole Catholic world excommunicated Nestorius and proclaimed again what had always been our faith — that the same divine Person who is the Son of God is also the Son of Mary. Even as St. Patrick left Rome on his missionary journey to the "Isle in the Western Sea" the Catholic world was singing paens of triumph to the Mother of God. It is small wonder, then, that Mary's favorite title in the early Irish Church was "Mother of God."

Among the sacred relics brought to Ireland by St. Patrick is mentioned a lock of hair of the Blessed Virgin. When parting with St. MacCairthen of Managhan, the Apostle of Ireland is reported to have said, "Receive the staff wherewith I support my limbs in journeying, and this reliquary wherein are contained portions of the relics of the holy Apostles, and of the hair of St. Mary, and of Our Lord's holy cross and of His sepulchre, and other sacred relics."\*

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\* "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae" ex *Codice Salamanicensi*, col. 799.

It should not be surprising to find a bishop sent as apostolic missionary to a whole nation entrusted with such relics, probably by Pope St. Celestine, particularly when we realize that it was so close to the lifetime of the Apostles themselves. The Catholic world was very small in comparison to the present, both in population and area, and relic hoarders were few and far between. So there would be enough to go around when needed.

God in His All-wise Providence foresaw that the bright, happy days of the "Isle of Saints and Scholars" would be followed by terrible centuries of persecution by the English. After their devotion to the Mass itself, devotion to Mary was the distinguishing feature of the Irish Church. Erin kept the faith in spite of all the fiendish tortures that England could devise because these heroic people attended Mass on their Mass rocks in the bogs and forests. The other great support of that heroic people was the family rosary, which more often than not replaced Mass after the priest had been hanged, drawn, and quartered for daring to keep the faith alive in the realm claimed by the English king — "the defender of the faith."

During the dark night of the Penal Days, the people had been robbed of their language, their homes, everything that the world held dear. Only those who apostatized and "took the King's shilling" enjoyed any prosperity in the world. The heroic sons and daughters of Patrick had only their faith left. It seemed utterly impossible that a small people could withstand the might and the relentless efforts of the great British Empire to exterminate them. Erin had an unshakable trust in God and His Mother; they knew that Mary would see them through, but they had not the slightest idea how.

"It would be passing strange, indeed, if Ireland alone were to be without her very own shrine of the Blessed Mother of God, seeing that Our Lady has been at all times the object of the most tender and enthusiastic affection of the Irish people. In one of the darkest hours of her history, in 1647, the National Confederation of Kilkenny passed an act proclaiming the Blessed Virgin Patroness of the Kingdom. The last century has brought many a

severe trial to the Irish people. Is it any wonder that Ireland's heavenly Queen should deign to give her children a singular and manifest token of her maternal solicitude?"\*

On a dark, rainy evening on August 21, 1879 at Knock, Mary McLoughlin, the housekeeper for the parish priest, was on her way to the home of Mrs. Beirne, when she noticed some strange figures outside the church — one representing our Lady, another St. Joseph, and the other a bishop. They were standing beside an altar. Thinking that they were new statues for the church, Mary hurried on to Berine's, anxious to learn all the news about their recent trip to Leuanvey, a local watering place.

After the visit, Mary Beirne walked part of the way back to the rectory with Mary McLoughlin. When they drew near the church Mary Beirne exclaimed, "They are not statues, they are moving. It's the Blessed Virgin!" With this, Mary Beirne dashed home to tell her mother and her brother Dominic to come and see the lovely sight.

Dominic told his mother to be sure and bring Mary home "before she makes a show of herself among the neighbors." But as they approached the church, they found that Mary was right. Others gathered in the pouring rain to witness the vision. Although some mention details that were missed by others, they all agreed on this: a bright light covered most of the gable end of the church which was behind the altar. Within this light were three figures, about two feet from the ground. The Blessed Virgin was clothed in white garments and was wearing a large brilliant crown. Her hands were raised to the height of her shoulders with the palms facing each other and near together, as she had appeared at Pontmain eight years before. Her eyes were turned heavenward as if in prayer. On her right was St. Joseph, with his head inclined toward her. His hair and beard were streaked with gray. St. John, the Evangelist, standing at her left, was vested as a bishop, his left hand holding a book and his right raised as if preaching. At his left was an altar on which stood a cross and a lamb, about eight weeks old.

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\* Rev. Ernest Graf, O.S.B., in "The Buckfast Chronicle," Buckfast, England.

Patrick Hill, one of the witnesses, saw angels with wings hovering around the altar, but he could not see their faces.

Mary McLoughlin hurried to tell Fr. Cavanagh about it and to urge him to come and see the vision. Through a misunderstanding, he thought the vision was over and did not go out. "I have regretted ever since," he said afterward, "that I omitted to do so. God may will the testimony to His Blessed Mother's presence should come from the simple faithful and not through his priests."

The vision lasted two hours and was seen by fifteen witnesses. Although it was pouring rain during that time, the wall of the church remained dry and was "bathed in a cloud of light."

Mass hallucination was impossible in this case, because one of the witnesses, Patrick Walsh, saw only the bright light from his farm at Balinderrig, "an English mile" from the church. He did not come and join the group gazing at the south wall of the church, and only learned about the figures the next day. If the group affected each other by a sort of telepathy, each making the other think he saw the same thing, they could not have so affected Patrick Walsh, who was not even in communication with them.

There were two other possible explanations offered; one was that an artist had painted the figures with luminous paint that day, and that after the people had gazed at them in the pouring rain for two hours, they were finally washed away. This presupposes that a man could erect a scaffolding in the most public part of a country village, where everybody knows everybody else's business and gossips about the most trivial details — without being noticed by anybody. After having painted the church wall — without the knowledge, much less permission, of the parish priest — he went off about his business. No motive was ever offered for a painter thus wasting his time without any compensation. Besides, the witnesses all agree that the wall remained perfectly dry through all the rain, and the figures moved from time to time. If the witnesses only thought they moved, they could not all think they moved at the same time and in the same way.

The only natural explanation was that someone shone a magic lantern on the wall. So a delegation of priests headed by Dr.

Lennon, a professor of Science at the University of Maynooth performed elaborate experiments with a magic lantern shining on the wall, but they could not even come close to producing the effect testified to by the fifteen witnesses.

The only explanation that makes any sense, in the light of the agreeing testimony of so many witnesses, and the cures wrought afterward, is that "God had visited His people."

The figures were intangible. Brigid Trench (aged "three score and fifteen years") went up to kiss the feet of the Virgin but found herself embracing only the wall. "I wondered," she said, "why I could not feel with my hands the figures I had so plainly and distinctly seen. . . ."<sup>\*</sup>

Within two months of the apparition, the Archbishop of Tuam appointed a commission of three priests to make a canonical investigation. After careful cross-examination of all people who could throw light on the subject, the commission reported that the testimony of the witnesses was "trustworthy and satisfactory." Nothing much was done in an official way after this until a later Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Walsh, took office. In 1936 he set up another commission which took evidence from the two surviving witnesses and from people who claimed miraculous cures through Our Lady of Knock. Although the report was sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1939, no verdict has yet been given. Bishops, priests, and people from all parts of Ireland have made private and organized pilgrimages to the shrine of Our Lady of Knock. Irishmen generally look upon it as the "Irish Lourdes." In fact, if one wants to live in peace on the Emerald Isle, one had better not be too loud in raising doubts about it.

Father Cavanagh kept a careful record of all cures reported to him attributed to the miraculous intervention of Our Lady of Knock. His diary ended with three hundred and ninety-four, and includes:

"John O'Brien, who was born blind, regained his sight after having made a pilgrimage at Knock."

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\* *Our Lady of Knock*, Coyne, Catholic Book Publishing Co., N. Y.

"Mrs. Doble of Claremorris had been lame for no less than seventeen years. She was scarcely able to touch the ground with her foot, and had to use a crutch and a stick in order to move the shortest distance. Her recovery at Knock was so complete that she left the crutch and the stick behind."

Besides these diary entries, Archbishop Murphy of Hobart, Tasmania, reported that his sight was completely restored at the age of eighty, and Archbishops Clune of Perth, Australia, and Lynch of Toronto, Canada, also reported themselves cured by Our Lady of Knock.

The cures reported at Knock are of the same nature as those at Lourdes and other famous shrines, and they fulfill the requirements for a "miraculous" cure. But here we see another difference between Ireland and France. France has a large, cynical group of atheists. The government has often been hostile — churches have been confiscated and religious men and women banished. The "intellectuals" were constantly challenging and sneering at claims of miracles. So it was necessary to prove all claims of miracles to the hilt. The medical bureau at Lourdes is composed of some outstanding doctors of the country, many of them Protestants and even atheists. When they pronounced a cure entirely beyond the power of science, after years of observation, no cynic could dare contradict them. There was no need of such elaborate machinery at Knock. So a medical bureau, along the lines of the "Bureau des Contestations" of Lourdes, was not set up until 1936. The "Knock Shrine Annual" reports a number of cures attested by the Bureau.

If our Lord under the figure of a lamb, with our Lady and St. Joseph and St. John, should see fit to visit a little parish in Mayo, the Irish took it as almost a matter of course. And nobody got excited when God answered the prayers of the good people and cured them of their ills. Had He not told them while still on earth, "If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you"?

Knock differs from other apparitions of our Lady in that no words were spoken. There was certainly no need to urge the people to prayer and penance — they were both the most intimate things

in their daily lives. They could not fast any more than they were already — people were dying by the thousands of starvation. And their prayers were the only thing that lighted their lives. Knock was rather a tableau to encourage the people in what they were already doing — being faithful to the Mass. It was not primarily an apparition of our Lady. She, who was present at the sacrifice of her Son at Calvary, appeared with St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist as heavenly witness to the supreme importance of the Mass.

The faithfulness of the Irish to the Mass, in spite of centuries of persecution of every possible kind, has been called “one of the miracles of history.” It was fitting that this miracle of constancy should be rewarded by the miracle of Knock.

## CHAPTER XII . . . *Terra De Santa Maria*

“O my God, I ask pardon for those who do not love Thee.” — The angel at Fatima, 1916

It would be surprising if He who heralds the coming sun by painting the sky with the exquisite colors of the dawn did not herald the coming of His mother to Portugal in some heavenly way.

The name “Fatima” is to the Moslems what “Mary” is to the Christians. She was the favorite daughter of Mohammed, and her name became a favorite among the Moors. In the days of Dom Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, the Calif of Alcacer’s daughter, named Fatima, was taken prisoner and brought before him. Afonso permitted Don Gonçalo (“The Moor-eater”) to marry her if she consented to the marriage and became a Christian. Fatima took the name of “Ouranea” (“Heavenly One”) in baptism. When his wife died, the “Moor-eater” became a monk of Alcobaça, which was the monastery of “Our Lady of Clairvaux,” patroness of Portugal. Some years later the abbot of Alcobaça had Fatima’s remains transferred to the little church and convent built to our Lady. The place has been called “Fatima” since the twelfth century. Located near the exact center — the heart — of the country, Fatima is thus associated with the birth of the nation, as it was to be with its rebirth seven centuries later.

“Fatima” means “Lady” in Arabic, according to most authorities — an appropriate name for her who has always been known as “our Lady” — but a French etymological dictionary construes it as, “She who brings peace.” If the latter is correct, nothing could be more fitting, as we shall see when our story unfolds.

The Cova da Iria, where our Lady actually appeared, has an

even more ancient and hallowed tradition. It is named after St. Iria or Irene who died in 652. Though she had consecrated her virginity to God, a young nobleman Berthauld still hoped to marry her. Listening to the voice of calumny and not waiting to find the truth about her virtue, he sent a soldier to kill her. After the murder he threw her corpse into the river. There is a legend that the Abbot Selio, her uncle, saw all this tragedy in a vision. As he came with his entourage to recover the body of his niece, the waters parted so that they could walk on the river bed. They found the body, ravishingly beautiful, lying in a lovely tomb. They found it impossible to move the tomb and had to be content with bringing some relics to the monastery of our Lady. As they withdrew, the waters enclosed the angel-made tomb forever. This legend, and the fact beneath the legend, gave the name Sant 'Iria, to the neighboring town, now called Santarem, and to the Cova da Iria where our Lady appeared.

Portugal has been called the "Land of Mary" because it has been literally that from its beginning as a nation. As the Moorish control of the Iberian peninsula weakened toward the close of the eleventh century, Alphonso VI, king of Castile conceived the idea of the "reconquista," which would reconquer the whole peninsula for Christianity. He assumed the title of Emperor of Spain, but he probably knew that it might mean centuries of war before his dream came true. Knowing he could not conquer the mighty califs of Cordova and Granada alone, he appealed to his kinsmen the Counts of Tolouse and Burgundy for help. A crusade of the Christians against the infidel had a great appeal in the Ages of Faith, especially when there was a chance for acquiring great and rich lands, the richest in Europe at that time, as spoils of war. Henry, Count of Burgundy, was assigned the western part of the peninsula and was given the title of Count of Portugal. Henry occupied the fortress of Leiria, now the see of the bishop of Fatima, and made it his military headquarters. He died in 1112 after fifteen years of skirmishing with the Moors, leaving the campaign to his eighteen-year-old son Afonso Henriques, the new Count of Burgundy and Portugal. After twenty-seven years of intermittent campaigning,

Henriques met the Moors south of the Tejo River on the plain of Orique and won a decisive battle, causing them to withdraw across the present Spanish border. He assumed the title of king — not count — of Portugal. His position as independent ruler was recognized by the Pope and finally by the King of Castile.

Slowly, in God's good time as the centuries rolled on, one shaft of light followed another as the day of Mary dawned on the world. Two centuries later João (John) I, the "second father of his country," ascended the throne. The Western Schism had torn Christendom apart. Even the saints were divided: St. Catherine of Siena and St. Catherine of Sweden were among the supporters of Urban, while St. Vincent Ferrer and St. Colette followed the antipope Clement VII. João I supported Urban while the Spaniards swore allegiance to the antipope and strove to seat a pretender on the throne of Portugal. God raised up (Blessed) Nuño Alvarez to lead King John's army against the invaders.

Nuño entered an armorer's shop at Santarem and asked the armorer to make him a sword for the coming campaign. When he returned the following day, he found his name on a sword, with a coat of arms, although he then had no title of nobility, and above was the name, "Maria." When he asked what he owed, the armorer said, "Sir, nothing just now, but when you return as Count of Ourem you can pay me." Devoted as he always was to our Lady, Nuño now felt he was her knight in a special way.

On August 15, 1385, he won a decisive battle over the Spaniards at Aljubarrota. He was named Constable of Portugal, Count of Ourem and first in the land after the king himself. Battle Abbey was built near the scene of the victory and given to the Dominicans, "the friars of Mary," and their praise of Mary echoed that of the Cistercians at Alcobaça a few leagues to the south. Batalha ("Battle Abbey") has since become the national shrine of Portugal where the unknown soldier of World War I is buried.

Toward the end of his life, Nuño renounced all his titles and lands, knocked at the gate of the Carmo (Carmelite monastery) in Lisbon, and was admitted as a lay brother, calling himself Brother Nuño of St. Mary. After he died, his sword was placed in the

hands of the statue of Elias, whom the Carmelites consider their father. Our Lady of Mount Carmel is, of course, their patroness. It is well to note here that Mary appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel in one of the apparitions at Fatima. Lucy, the sole survivor of the three children to whom she appeared, is now a Carmelite nun, Sister Lucy of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

God's preparation for His Mother's visit swelled to a greater crescendo on Annunciation day three centuries later. In 1646, João IV issued his celebrated decree proclaiming new and formal recognition of Mary Immaculate as patroness and defender of the realm. He proposed to the assembled *Cortes* a renewal of their vassalage to our Lady with a more particular and solemn celebration of the feast of her Conception. He pledged himself to defend to death, if need be, the doctrine that Mary was conceived without stain of original sin. The members of the national University of Coimbra took a similar oath.

Is it any wonder that Pope Benedict XV should say in 1918 that he could not believe that the depressed state of the Church in Portugal would continue? A mother is not outdone in generosity by her children, and such devotion to Mary certainly merited some singular, outstanding help in the dark days of persecution after 1916.

Every diocese in the country is dedicated to Mary under one title or another. Leiria, the diocese of Fatima, is very appropriately dedicated to the Queen of Heaven.

The visit of Our Lady to Fatima in 1917 could be considered by our Lord the most important since He took her bodily into heaven about the year A.D. 45, because it seems to be the only one heralded by an angel.

In 1916, Lucy Santos and her little cousins Francisco and Jacinta Marto were in the fields tending their sheep. They were near their home in the village of Aljustrel at the foot of the rocky elevation sixty feet high called Cabeço ("The Head"). It was about ten o'clock in the morning and a slight rain had begun to fall. They climbed the Cabeço seeking shelter, followed by the sheep, and entered the cave near the top. After lunch they said

the rosary and started to play jacks. Then they threw stones down into the valley.

Suddenly the rain stopped and a strong wind began to blow. Startled by this, they looked over the olive trees and saw a dazzling light, and in the midst of it a human form coming toward them. It seemed to be a young man but more brilliant than a crystal pierced by the rays of the sun, and transparent.

When he came quite near he said gently, "Do not be afraid, I am the Angel of Peace. Pray with me."

Then he knelt, bending his forehead to the ground. Obeying some interior impulse, the children did the same and repeated the words they heard him pronounce:

"O my God, I believe, I adore, I hope and I love Thee. I ask pardon for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love Thee."

The angel repeated this prayer three times. Then he arose and said to the children:

"Pray thus. The Hearts of Jesus and Mary will be touched by your prayers."

Then he disappeared as if he had been dissolved in the sunlight.

The children remained kneeling for some time in ecstasy. Recalling her impressions twenty-five years later, Sister Lucy said, the feeling was "so intense that, for a long while, we scarcely realized our own existence, remaining as the angel had left us, ever repeating the same prayer."

"The presence of God was felt so intensely, so intimately," Lucy went on to say, "that we could not speak even to one another. The next day our souls were still wrapt in that atmosphere, which disappeared only little by little."

So deeply were the children impressed that they never forgot the words of the angel. When left unnoticed, they would prostrate themselves as the angel had taught them and repeat the prayer over and over.

But they were children, and with the coming of summer the spell gradually wore off. Like all children they danced and played and sang.

One day they were behind the well in Lucy's garden. Suddenly, without warning, the angel visited them again.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "Pray, pray much! The Holy Hearts of Jesus and Mary have plans of mercy in regard to you. . . . Continually offer up sacrifices and prayers to the Lord."

Here Lucy asked, "How shall we make sacrifices?"

"You can make sacrifices of all things," he answered. "Offer them in reparation of all the sins that offend God, and ask of Him the conversion of sinners. Thus draw peace upon your country. I am its Guardian Angel, the Angel of Portugal. Above all, accept and endure all the sufferings which Our Lord will send you."

As happened later at the Cova da Iria, only Lucy and Jacinta heard the angel's words. Francisco saw him and knew he was speaking to the girls. The next day, when Lucy felt able to talk about it, she told Francisco what was said.

Years later Lucy explained that the words were "like a light, which gave them to understand how much God loved them and how much He wished to be loved; how great, too, was the value of sacrifice, and how much the Lord takes it into account for the conversion of sinners."

From that moment, the three children set themselves to offer the Lord all that they could suffer for His sake. But especially they repeated the angel's prayer, with their foreheads touching the ground.

Autumn came, and the children were in the cave again at the Cabeço. Having finished lunch, they said the rosary and the prayer that the angel had taught them. Suddenly they found themselves surrounded by a wonderful brightness.

The angel was standing beside them. This time he was holding a chalice, above it was a Host, from which drops of blood were falling into the chalice.

Leaving the chalice and Host, which remained mysteriously suspended in midair, he knelt beside the children and made them repeat three times:

"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I adore You profoundly, and offer You the Most Precious Body, Blood, Soul

and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, to repair the outrages, sacrileges and indifferences by which He Himself is offended.

"By the infinite merits of His Most Holy Heart and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg for the conversion of all poor sinners."

The angel then rose, took the Host and presented it to Lucy, who received it. The contents of the chalice he divided between Francisco and Jacinta. At the same time he said:

"Take the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful man. Repair their sins and console your God!"

Prostrating himself again, he repeated three times the prayer "Most Holy Trinity, etc. . . ." and disappeared.

The children remained completely absorbed in the presence of God.

They then returned home, and said nothing about the heavenly visit.

## CHAPTER XIII . . . The Queen Takes Her Throne

*"You must say the rosary."* — OUR LADY to the children at Cova da Iria, May 13, 1917

On May 5, 1917, Pope Benedict XV published a letter he addressed to Cardinal Gasparri, his Secretary of State. After recounting all he and his predecessor had done to bring about peace — only to be unheeded by the warring nations of Europe — he asked that Catholics join together in a crusade of prayer *"that her most tender and benign solicitude may be moved and the peace We ask for be obtained for our troubled world."* At the same time he commanded that the invocation "Queen of Peace, pray for us" be permanently added to the Litany of Loreto.

Eight days later, as soon as the world heard the appeal of the Pope, Mary answered with dramatic suddenness.

Lucy, Francisco, and Jacinta took their flock of sheep to the Cova da Iria. It was a beautiful day in May — not a cloud in the sky. After lunch they said the rosary, as was their custom, and then started to build a house. (There was something prophetic about what they were doing, because at that spot was later raised the largest church in Portugal.) Suddenly they saw what they thought was a blinding flash of lightning. Fearing a sudden May storm, they started to hurry home. When they got down into the hollow they were stopped by an even brighter flash. Looking up to the right, they saw a globe of light over a carrasquiera or holm-oak tree, and in that globe a beautiful lady, who seemed to be made up of light. She seemed to be about fifteen years old. She was brighter than the sun, but still not hurting the eyes. When they were about to run away, she said,

*"Do not be afraid. I will not harm you."*

"Where does your excellency come from?" asked Lucy in the polite idiom of Portugal.

"*I come from Heaven,*" the beautiful lady answered, gently raising her hand toward the eastern horizon.

"What does your excellency want of me?" asked Lucy humbly.

"*I come to ask you to meet here six times in succession, at this same hour, on the thirteenth of each month. In October I will tell you who I am and what I expect of you. And I shall return here again a seventh time.*"

"You come from Heaven. . . . And shall I, too, go to Heaven?" asked Lucy.

"Yes," the lady answered, "*but you must say the rosary, and say it properly.*" (The little children, thinking the prayer too long for their youthful spirits, used to say only the first two words of the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary.")

"And Jacinta?"

"*She will go too.*"

"And Francisco?"

"*Yes, but he must say many rosaries.*"

At this point, Francisco said,

"I don't see anything, Lucy! Throw a stone at it to see if it is real."

Naturally, Lucy would not throw a stone at the Lady. She asked, "So you are Our Lady and Francisco can't see you?"

"Let him say the rosary, and in that way he too will see me," she answered.

When Francisco was told the Lady's command, he took out his beads quickly and started saying them. Before he finished the first decade, he too saw the "Lady more brilliant than the sun."

Now the Lady came to the purpose of her visit:

"*Do you wish to offer yourselves to God, to endure all the sufferings He may please to send you, as an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended, and to ask for the conversion of sinners?*"

Probably remembering what the Angel of Peace had said to them the year before, Lucy said, "Yes, we do."

The Lady showed by her expression how much she was pleased by this childlike enthusiasm. Then she added:

*"Then you will have much to suffer, but the grace of God will assist you and always bear you up."*

As she said these words, the Lady opened her hands, which until then had been joined together. From the palms came two streams of light, so intense and so intimate that they seemed to penetrate the inmost parts of their hearts and souls, "making us see ourselves in God," as Lucy said later, "more clearly in that light than in the best of mirrors." By common impulse, they fell on their knees and said fervently:

"Most Holy Trinity, I adore You! My God, my God, I love You in the Most Blessed Sacrament."

Then the Lady gave her parting message — the dominant thought she wished them to keep in their minds:

*"Say the Rosary every day to earn peace for the world and the end of the war."*

Then the Lady began to move away toward the east, from which she came. She did not seem to move her feet, but went "quite straight, all of a piece." She was still surrounded by a most brilliant light. Finally she vanished in the immensity of the heavens.

After they had recovered from their ecstasy, they compared notes. All three had seen the vision, and it appeared the same to all, as the painstaking cross-questionings brought out later. But Lucy alone had spoken to the Lady. Jacinta, too, heard everything the Lady said, but Francisco heard only Lucy. This helped to prove the truth of the apparitions, for children would never have invented such a difference in their perceptions.

In spite of the incredulity of everyone except Ti Marto, the father of Francisco and Jacinta, in spite of the beatings given by Lucy's mother, in spite of the skepticism of the parish priest himself, the children maintained their story. Ti Marto said:

"From the beginning of the world, Our Lady has appeared many times in various ways. If the world is in bad shape today, it would be worse but for many such happenings. The power of

God is great. We don't know what this is, but it will turn out to be something. God's will be done."

The shepherds were the first to see the Holy Family at Bethlehem, and this simple peasant was the first to believe in Mary's visit to Fatima.

The late Pope Pius XII was consecrated a bishop by Benedict XV on May 13, 1917, the very day of the first apparition. He had great devotion to Our Lady of Fatima, and his election as Pope in March, 1939, marked the beginning of world-wide devotion. In 1942, on October 31, he sent a message to the Portuguese hierarchy who were celebrating the silver jubilee of Fatima, consecrating the Church and the human race to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This consecration was repeated in St. Peter's on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, of the same year. In 1946 he sent his legate "a latere" Cardinal Masella to Fatima to crown the statue of our Lady. He himself preached in Portuguese over the radio to the assembled crowd, estimated at 600,000. In 1948 he wrote an encyclical "Auspicio quaedam" to the whole Catholic world recommending that every diocese, parish, family, and individual be dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

He closed the world-wide celebration of the Holy Year in 1951 by addressing a million pilgrims at Fatima on October 13, and on July 7, 1952, the feast of SS. Cyril and Methodius, Apostles to the Slavs; he addressed an apostolic letter to all the peoples of Russia, consecrating them in a very special way to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It has often been asked why the story of Fatima was not given to the world long ago, especially when the terrible World War II would have been prevented by people heeding our Lady's requests. The answer is that the Bishops of the Church are always very slow before granting their approbation. Sometimes individual bishops are accused of "incredulity and hardness of heart," as the Apostles were by our Lord when they refused to believe the accounts of those who said they had seen Him after His resurrection. But God in His Wisdom permits this.

## CHAPTER XIV . . . The June Apparition, June 13, 1917

June 13 is the feast of St. Anthony — he was born in Portugal, and so the expression “St. Anthony of Padua (Italy)” is anathema in that country. He is “St. Anthony of Lisbon” and is one of the great national saints. Everybody who called himself Catholic went to his church that day for the grand fiesta.

The parents thought they could wean the children’s minds away from their troublesome talk about “the beautiful lady” by telling them all about the great feast.

It was no use. The beautiful lady had told them to meet her at the Cova on the thirteenth of June. They were going to keep their tryst. All the inducements in this world were nothing when heaven was concerned.

There were about fifty other people present at the Cova. Finally the three children came. After pointing out to the crowd where our Lady appeared, they ate lunch and then said the rosary. A short time later, Lucy said,

“There is the lightning! Our Lady is coming.”\*

With that she ran down to the holm-oak tree of the apparition, followed by her cousins.

Maria da Capelinha said later, “I heard all that Lucy said to the vision, but I saw nothing and could not hear the answers. But I noticed a marvelous thing: it was the month of June, and the tree had all its branches covered with long, fresh green shoots. Now, when Lucy announced that the Lady was leaving, she had let her dress drag over them.”

“When we knelt on the bushes and the gorse, Lucy raised her hands as in prayer, and I heard her say,

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\* Lucy later explained that it was not really lightning, but the reflection on the horizon of “Our Lady of Light” as she approached from the east.

"Your Excellency told me to come here. Please say what you want of me."

"Then we could hear something like a very faint voice, which we could not make out. It was like a buzzing of a bee."

Although the sky was cloudless, some of the people noticed that the sun became dimmer. Others noticed that the holm-oak bent and curved at the top, as if under a weight.

The Lady told Lucy, "*I want you to come here on the thirteenth of the coming month, to recite the 'terco'\* every day, and to learn to read. Later I will tell you what I want.*"

She also told them, when saying the rosary, to insert between the decades:

"O my Jesus, forgive us;  
Save us from the fire of hell.  
Lead the souls of all to heaven,  
Especially those in greatest need."†

Seeing the beautiful Lady, and longing to be at home with her, the child then said,

"I should like to ask you to take us to Heaven."

"Yes, Jacinta and Francisco I will take soon. But you remain here for some time more. Jesus will use you to make me better known and more loved. He wishes to establish throughout the world the devotion to my Immaculate Heart."

"Am I to stay here alone?" asked Lucy. No separation is as poignant as that of children.

"No, daughter. Do you suffer a great deal? Do not be discouraged. I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God."

As at the first apparition, our Lady parted her hands. The intense light coming from them penetrated the hearts of the children. They saw themselves as if plunged in God. It seemed that

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\* A third, or five decades, of the rosary.

† Father McGlynn, O.P., put the Portuguese words into this rhythmical verse so that people could say the beads better together. The Congregation of Rites, in response to a question, said that adding this prayer did not take any indulgences away from the rosary (Feb. 13, 1957).

Francisco and Jacinta were in one stream that rose up to heaven, and Lucy was in the other that spread itself all over the world.

Before the right hand they saw a heart pierced by thorns on every side. They understood that this was the Immaculate Heart of Mary, wounded by the sins of the world, asking for reparation.

Then the Lady glided swiftly back toward the east.

Maria da Capelinha heard Lucy say, "Pronto! Now she can't be seen any more. Now she is entering heaven. Now the doors are being shut."

Maria said that when our Lady left the tree there was a sound as of the hissing of a distant rocket. But she saw nothing but a slight cloud, just a few inches away from the foliage, rising slowly toward the east.

## CHAPTER XV . . . The Message of Fatima, July 13, 1917

*"If they listen to my request, Russia will be converted and there will be peace."*

— OUR LADY OF FATIMA, July 13, 1917

The message of Fatima is not the result of gullibility — the children had to overcome mountains of disbelief. Lucy's fear that the apparitions were the work of the devil increased as July 13 drew near, especially as the parish priest kept repeating this to the whole parish. When some pointed out that there was praying at the Cova, and the devil's work could not encourage the people to pray, Father Ferreira answered that the devil even goes to the Communion rail. The good Father would have a hard time substantiating that last statement, but he succeeded in making Lucy suffer torments.

Finally she told Francisco and Jacinta that she was not going. They should tell the Lady, if she asked for her, that she stayed away because she feared she was the devil! Then, grief-stricken, she hurried away.

But on the morning of the thirteenth, she felt herself drawn to the Cova by an irresistible impulse. Going to her cousin's home, she found Francisco and Jacinta kneeling by the bed, crying bitterly.

"Well," she said, "aren't you going? It is time."

"Without you we dare not go. Come with us."

"I'm going," Lucy answered.

The three set off happily for the Cova, but they could not go very fast, because now the roads were jammed with people who

stopped them and asked them to ask our Lady for special favors. The two mothers went along too, carrying blessed candles to ward off the devil, but they followed secretly and hid behind a tree. Ti Marto, on the other hand, went boldly and stood beside his children.

In June there had been about forty or fifty onlookers. Now there were between two and three thousand, so that Ti Marto had trouble getting through the crowd.

Lucy knelt down and led the rosary. Afterward she said, "Take off your hats! Take off your hats, for I see Our Lady already."

Ti Marto said he saw something that looked like a little white cloud descend upon the holm-oak. The sun became dimmer and a breeze sprang up. He heard something but only Lucy and Jacinta could distinguish the words.

As at every other visit, our Lady urged everybody to say the rosary. In particular she urged people to say it with the intention of bringing about an early end of the war. "For the intercession of the Blessed Virgin alone can obtain this grace for men."

Then Lucy remembered the doubts that tormented her and her whole family, so she said,

"I wish to ask you to tell us who you are, and to perform a miracle so that everyone will believe that you have appeared to us."

Our Lady answered, "*Continue to come here every month. In October I will tell you who I am and what I desire. And I will perform a miracle so that the whole world will believe you.*"

Then Lucy went on, "I still have many things to ask you, Madam: would you cure a poor cripple? . . ."

Maria Carriera had been planning for this visit of the "Queen of Portugal." Her son John was a hunchback whose knees crossed and knocked together as he walked. Above all else in the world she wanted him to be like other boys.

In answer to this request, our Lady answered that she would not cure him, but would make it possible for him to earn his own livelihood if he said the rosary every day. (John soon became able to support himself.) When asked to take a certain sick person

to heaven and relieve his sufferings, our Lady recommended patience, saying that she knew better than he when was the best time to come for him. And to all she said that they must recite the rosary.

Then, "to renew my cooled fervor," as Lucy humbly said, our Lady again urged them to "*sacrifice yourselves for sinners, and say often, but especially when you are making some sacrifices: 'O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and to repair the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.'*"

Then, our Lady revealed the Message of Fatima, two parts of which Lucy told to her bishop in 1938, as the war drew near. The third part of the secret is known only to Lucy. It has been committed to writing and is in the custody of the Bishop of Leiria, who does not even know himself what is in the sealed envelope in his secret archives. It will be opened in 1960.

She opened her hands, as in the first two apparitions, but this time the light from her palms penetrated the earth and seemed to throw hell open before them. They seemed to be before a great sea of fire, into which were plunged demons and souls in human form, black and burning, like live transparent coals. The fire lifted them up, but they fell back on all sides, without weight or balance, amid blood-curdling screams of pain and despair. The demons had the form of strange animals, horribly repulsive.

Lucy said later that if they had not already been assured of going to heaven, they would have died then and there of horror.

Instinctively the children turned to their Mother for help. She said, "*You have seen Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them Our Lord wishes to have established in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart. If people do what I shall tell you, many souls shall be saved, and there will be peace in the world. The war is going to end.*

*"But if they do not stop offending God, another and worse war will begin in the reign of Pius XI. When you shall see a night illumined by an unknown light, know that it is the great sign that God gives you that He is going to punish the world for its*

*crimes by means of war, hunger, persecution of the Church and of the Holy Father.*

*"To prevent this I shall come to ask the consecration of Russia to My Immaculate Heart and the Communion of Reparation on the first Saturdays. If they listen to my requests, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she will scatter her errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, various nations will be annihilated.*

*"In the end, My Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and a certain period of peace will be granted to the world. In Portugal, the dogma of the faith will be kept always. Tell this to no one. To Francisco, yes, you may tell it."*

Then our Lady told the third part of the secret, which will be revealed in 1960. Because the second part of the July message springs logically from the first, it would be natural to expect that the third (secret) part has a logical connection with what we already know. Beyond this it is a waste of time to speculate. When asked about many things concerning the apparition of Fatima, e.g., the meaning of the star near the bottom of our Lady's dress, whether that stood for the star of Russia laid at her feet, Lucy answers, "I don't know." The most valuable thing about Lucy's account is that it is faithful reporting — she does not inject her own guesswork into her reports. Later, in a general view of all our Lady's visits, we may understand this July message better.

After our Lady told the third part of the secret, Lucy asked in her eagerness to serve our Lady:

*"Do you want nothing more of me?"*

Our Lady answered, *"No, today I want nothing more of thee."*

With a last affectionate glance at her children, our Lady started back toward the east. There was a sound as of the clap of thunder which shook the rude arch and its vigil lamps that had been erected over the holm-oak. Finally, our Lady disappeared in "the immense distance of the firmament."

Although the people could not understand anything our Lady

said, they saw how horrified the children were at one time, and they were all bursting with curiosity.

"Lucy, what did Our Lady say to make you so sad?"

Neither Lucy nor Jacinta could tell it, except to say that the secret contained good news for some, bad for others.

The crowd kept milling around the children, so that there was danger they would be smothered. Finally Ti Marto and some other men rescued them and took them home.

To appreciate the prophecies of our Lady, we must put ourselves in 1917. She said on July 13, "The war will soon end." From a human standpoint, it seemed like the reverse was true. The United States had entered the war only three months before. We had sent no appreciable force to France by that time. Terrible trench warfare had been sapping the life of both sides. It looked like a hopeless stalemate — another "Hundred Years' War." Defensive tactics seemed to have overwhelmed the offense, and neither side would give up. Portugal was on the allied side, but prospects seemed anything but bright.

Two days later, on July 15, Ludendorff launched his tremendous offensive. It might have resulted in what it was intended for — the destruction of the allies before America could throw in her weight. Nothing seemed more unlikely, then and later, than that the allies should finally win. But the new world came to the rescue of the old. Chateau Thierry, Soissons, the Argonne — and the war was over on November 11, 1918.

But for anybody to talk about a second war before the end of the first was in sight, was ridiculous. And when the "World War" finally ended, it was even more ridiculous. This had been the "war to end wars." It was the "war to make the world safe for democracy." The League of Nations was formed. Force as an instrument of national policy was outlawed. All disputes between nations would be settled in the parliament of man. The dream of ages had finally come true. Besides, Germany, the troublemaker, would never be allowed to rearm. If anyone had said that in the pontificate of the very next pope another and worse world war would break out, he would have raised a contemptuous sneer, for

the whole world knew that war was a thing of the past. Like other barbarous practices — cannibalism and witch burning — the civilized world had outgrown and outlawed war.

"He who dwelleth in Heaven shall mock them,  
And the Lord will laugh them to scorn."

Our Lady came from heaven and said just that. And to show she knew what she was talking about, she called the next pope by name — Pius XI.

*"When you see the sky illumined by an unknown light, know that it is the great sign that God gives you, that He is going to punish the world for its crimes by means of war, hunger, persecution of the Church and of the Holy Father."*

On the feast of the conversion of St. Paul — that day when Saul of Tarsus was struck from his horse and blinded by a bolt of lightning, to become Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles — on that feast day in 1938, January 25, a strange light was seen in the northern sky. It was reported in New England and all through Europe. It was different than any aurora borealis that had ever been seen. Lucy wrote her bishop and told him that this was indeed the sign predicted by our Lady. She considered the war to have started with Hitler's invasion of Austria, March 12, 1938, which indeed took place under the pontificate of Pius XI.

As for Russia, nobody took that country seriously in 1917. The Czar's government collapsed, releasing German troops for the western front, and Russia became a chaos of warring factions. If anyone told us that Russia would be a threat to the world, we would have taken it as a joke — Russia could not even put her own house in order. The U. S. government did not even recognize the Soviet government for fifteen years.

*"If they heed my request, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she shall spread her errors throughout the world, various nations will be annihilated."* "Annihilated" is the strongest possible word. We have only to listen to the report which comes from the other side of the Iron Curtain to realize that this is fast becoming literally true.

Not since Henry VIII beheaded Cardinal Fisher in 1535 had anyone dared lay hands on a prince of the Church. But Cardinal Mindszenty, the Primate of Hungary, has been treated worse. Only Satan himself is capable of such diabolical hate and persecution.

Archbishop Stepinac of Yugoslavia has long since been engulfed. The shepherd has been struck, and the sheep have been dispersed.

The words of heaven have a way of coming literally true!

Losing a war with the Communists is not like losing a baseball game — if we lose this battle we lose our very existence, as a nation and as individuals. There will be no return match.

Monsignor McGrath, formerly a prefect apostolic in China, has traveled the length and breadth of America with the "Pilgrim Virgin" statue of Our Lady of Fatima, spreading the message of Fatima. He has this to say of the spread of Communism:

"An all out Communist regime bent on the extermination of Christianity now controls the destiny of one fourth of the world's population in China and brings to the fore in startling fashion the prediction uttered by Lenin twenty-five years ago: 'The real revolution will blaze forth when the 800,000,000 of Asia unite with us.'\* The real revolution! To date we have seen nothing! The merciless 'liquidation' of most of the democratic leaders of Europe; the hard route marches of the legions of the damned on their way to Siberia and death; the complete destruction of the hierarchy and clergy of one-time Catholic countries; the torture and murder of thousands of priests and religious not to speak of the martyrdom of five millions for the faith! All this is but a curtain raiser to the *real revolution* that will *blaze* forth once the Orient has fallen prey to Communist domination. With control of these teeming millions now virtually an accomplished fact, the long arm of Communist Russia is now groping toward the

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\* As of April 21, 1955, 941,868,086 people were under Red domination including only those behind the iron and bamboo curtains and excluding communists in free countries taking orders from Moscow and Peiping, according to the Associated Press. Total world population estimated at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  billion.

Continent of Africa. A London dispatch of October, 1949, reveals the efforts of the Reds to create a 'Black Proletariat' in Africa and records the details of the propaganda emanating from the Russian legation in Addis Abbaba. Yet so completely apathetic have we become in the face of threatening disaster that to millions of people in America to-day a 'homer' in the world series, or an end run by redoubtable Notre Dame is a matter of infinitely greater concern than the loss of another friendly continent to the forces relentlessly bent on America's destruction."\*

The only thing that will prevent it is a miracle — the conversion of Russia. Our Lady told us two generations ago how this can be brought about.

Now it is up to us — you and me. God will give Russia the grace of conversion when the world asks Him for it. We can do it now or we can do it the hard way — after we are beaten to our knees.

We are reminded by our Mother at Fatima to put the accent where it belongs — our first concern should be to get into heaven ourselves, and then to work and pray especially for those in greatest need of God's mercy. We are warned to work, pray, and make sacrifices for that persecuted and deluded people oppressed by the "league of militant godless." And the price we will pay for failing to work for Russia's conversion is that we too will be brought under the Red terror.

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\* *Fatima or World Suicide*, by W. C. McGrath, S.F.M., Scarborough Press, pp. 8, 9.

## CHAPTER XVI . . . "I Will Put Enmity Between Thee and the Woman" — The August Apparition

*"Pray very much and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to hell because they have not someone to pray and make sacrifices for them."*

— OUR LADY OF FATIMA, August 19, 1917

The age-old battle between Mary and Lucifer has greatly intensified in the past thirty-two years with the rise of Bolshevism. Perhaps it has reached a new high in world history, and it is rapidly rising much higher.

It did not take Satan and his forces long to react against the visits of Mary, his archenemy, to Fatima.

The village of Fatima belongs to the county of Ourem. Arthur Santos, a former tinsmith, was administrator, and wielded tremendous power. An apostate Catholic, he founded a Masonic lodge at Ourem. Through his political power and his newspaper, he was bending every effort to undermine the faith of the people. Already the peasants were cringing before him.

When he heard of the apparitions, he decided "he would make short work of this nonsense."

On the morning of August 13, Ti Marto found the administrator in his house. "I want to see the miracle too," he said.

Ti Marto thought he detected a slight odor of brimstone.

"I'll take the children in my carriage," he announced, with a surprising burst of generosity. "As Thomas said, 'Seeing is believing.'"

Pretending to take the children to the Cova, where they were

to keep their rendezvous with the Lady, the magistrate took them off in his carriage. But, instead of going to the Cova, he took the road to Ourem.

When the people saw what he was up to, they stoned the carriage. But he managed to escape with the children.

When he reached the house, he pushed them into a room, locked it, and told them they could not leave until they told him the secret.

Now we see the children were fulfilling our Lady's prophecy of suffering. First the magistrate tried kindness, then wiles and bribes to get them to tell the secret. Finally they were thrown into jail and a vat of boiling oil was heated.

Jacinta, the youngest, was first. Naturally the apostate thought she would give up most easily.

While this was going on, Francisco said, "If they kill us, we shall soon be in Heaven. Nothing else matters. I hope Jacinta does not get scared. I should say a Hail Mary for her."

And he straightway pulled off his cap and suited the action to the words.

When Jacinta refused to say it was all a fraud, or to reveal the secret, she was ordered to be taken away and thrown in the vat of boiling oil. Actually, she was taken to another room. Then Francisco and Lucy were, in turn, subjected to the same treatment. Reunited, each was surprised that no harm had befallen the others.

The next day, Santos tried another inquisition — a ridiculous anticlimax. The trial was providential. In spite of himself, the magistrate made the existence of a secret revelation undeniable, for it became a matter of official record — God gets good out of evil. Finally he admitted defeat and took them back home.

On the following Sunday, August 19, Lucy, Francisco, and his brother John took the sheep out to graze after Mass. About four o'clock in the afternoon they found themselves in a hollow called Valinhos, at the foot of the Cabeço, where the angel appeared a year before.

Suddenly Lucy became aware of the signs that always heralded our Lady's coming: the air cooled, the sun paled, and there was

the typical flash. Already they had been having a premonition that our Lady would visit them in August after all. Lucy looked at Francisco and knew that he felt the same way.

"John," said Lucy, "go quickly and get Jacinta! Our Lady is coming! We will mind the sheep while you are gone."

Naturally, John wanted to see our Lady too, so he did not want to go.

"I will give you four pennies if you go fast, and bring back Jacinta with you. I'll give you two now, and the other two when you return."

Lucy could turn a neat business deal. John took the two pennies and ran home. Finally he located Jacinta at her godmother's and brought her back with him. Just as they arrived, the second brilliant flash rent the air. A few moments later, the Lady "more brilliant than the sun" appeared over the holm-oak, one slightly taller than the one at the Cova da Iria. The Lady was rewarding the children for their willingness to die for her.

"What is it that you want of me?" asked Lucy.

*"I want you to continue to come to the Cova da Iria on the thirteenth day, and to continue to say the Rosary daily."*

Then Lucy poured out from her heart all the anguish they had gone through because so many refused to believe it was really our Lady. She asked our Lady if she would be willing to convince the unbelievers by the only thing they would recognize — a miracle.

"Yes," was the answer, *"in October I will perform a miracle so that all may believe in my apparitions. Had they not taken you to the village, the miracle would have been greater. St. Joseph will come with the Infant Jesus to bring peace to the world. Our Lord also will come and bless the people. Moreover, Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Sorrows will come."*

After the July apparition, people left money at the foot of the holm-oak. Maria da Capelinha gathered it up, but neither the parish priest nor anybody else would take it. Lucy asked what was to be done with the money.

*"Make two litters,"* said our Lady, *"You, Jacinta and two other girls dressed in white are to carry one; Francisco and three other*

*boys in white are to carry the other. The money placed on the litters is for the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary."*

Then Lucy asked about some of the sick who had been recommended to our Lady.

"*Some I shall cure within the year,*" was the answer. But our Lady pointed out what was far more important:

"*Pray very much and make sacrifices for sinners, for many souls go to Hell because they have not someone to pray and make sacrifices for them.*"

Then our Lady began to rise toward the east. John saw and heard nothing during the interview, but as our Lady left he heard a noise like the hissing of a rocket.

They broke off a branch of the holm-oak that had been brushed by our Lady's robe and took it home to their parents.

"Aunt Maria Rosa," Jacinta cried out to Lucy's mother, "we saw our Lady again. It was at Valinhos!"

They got another blast of incredulity.

"My, what little liars you have become! As if Our Lady would appear to you wherever you go!"

To prove they saw her, they showed Maria Rosa the twig on which she stood. When Maria Rosa took the twig she noticed its beautiful fragrance — not perfume, scented soap, incense, roses, or anything else she recognized.

Lucy's sister Teresa and her husband, as they were coming to the village of Fatima, noticed the cooling of the air, the paling of the sun which accompanied the beautiful pattern of different colors over the countryside, as happened at the Cova on August 13, when the Lady kept her part of the rendezvous. This happened about four o'clock, at the very time the children said they saw our Lady at Valinhos, nearby.

Like the pastor, Lucy's family began to realize the aura of heaven was upon them.

## CHAPTER XVII . . . *The September Apparition*

The editor of the local anarchist newspaper *O Mundo* (*The World*) was a man named "Jose do Vale" ("Joe of the Valley"). This Joe decided he would expose the "truth" about Fatima and so put an end to the nonsense. He would get the people together after the last Mass at Fatima on Sunday and expose this fraud.

In a small parish, the pastor soon hears everything that is going on, so he quietly passed the word that Mass that Sunday would be in the chapel of Our Lady at Ortiga, two miles away.

When "Joe of the Valley" arrived at the parish church at Fatima he found nobody there, so he proceeded to the Cova da Iria.

He and his followers were greeted by a reception committee. The Catholics of Lomba d'Egua and Moita had a whole herd of donkeys tied to the trees near the scene of the apparitions. As the radicals drew near, the Catholics rubbed the noses of the burros with "a certain liquid" which is guaranteed to evoke the most blood-curdling noises from the beasts. The bray of a jack-ass is like nothing in this world. Ten giant alley cats tied together, with the screams of the dying on the battlefield added to the cries of rage and pain in hell itself are the most like it. So "Valley Joe" was serenaded by an asinine symphony that sounded like his diabolical master's voice.

When they arrived at the holm-oak, they found a pile of hay and feed laid out for their noon repast. To make sure that even such asses as they would not miss the point, the farmers from Moita expressed their opinion of them in so many words.

Enraged, Joe and Company shouted vile remarks about the Church and the saints. But the people would take off their hats whenever something sacred was mentioned and would cry:

"Viva Jesus e Maria! Jesus e Maria!"

As the cries of frustrated rage grew louder, the people would call the reds,

"O burros, O beasts! Burros! Beasts!"

So compliments were exchanged. The farmers were called "Hillbillies," etc. Policemen were brought to catch the farmers who eluded them and made them look more foolish. So Joe and his "mule-heads" retired in confusion, the laughingstock of the neighborhood. He was never heard of again at the Cova da Iria.

As the thirteenth of September drew near, thousands of people came to Aljustrel and the Cova. Everyone wanted to speak to the little seers and ask special favors from our Lady. Even noble ladies and the gentlemen fell on their knees before the children, "For the love of God, ask Our Lady to cure my lame child"; "Ask her to make my child see"; "Ask her to bring my son and my husband back from the war." Like Zaccheus, some even climbed trees, or shouted their requests from walls or housetops.

Lucy told later in her memoirs: "When I read now in the New Testament of the enchanting scenes that accompanied Our Lord through Palestine, I remember these others, that Our Lady made me, who was so young, witness on the roads and lanes from Aljustrel to Fatima and the Cova da Iria."

When they arrived at the Cova, with the help of many men who opened a way through the crowd, estimated at about ten thousand, Lucy started the rosary, the people responding.

Somewhere about the fourth decade, a globe of light lit up the far horizon. As the children were expecting it, they immediately arose and looked toward the east. Soon the others saw the globe of light, which they had come to recognize as our Lady's chariot. It rested over the same holm-oak as before. The children again saw Our Lady of the Rosary as she had appeared on the other occasions.

"What do you want of me?" Lucy asked.

"Let the people continue to say the Rosary every day to obtain the end of the war," answered our Lady. Then she repeated her promise made on August 19: "In October, the last month, I will perform a miracle so that all may believe in my apparitions. If

*they had not taken you to the village, the miracle would have been greater. St. Joseph will come with the infant Jesus to give peace to the world. Our Lord also will come to bless the people. Besides, Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Sorrows will come. God is pleased with your sacrifices but does not wish that you sleep with the rope. Wear it only during the day."*

Then Lucy told of the many requests for cures. Our Lady promised that a deaf-mute girl would be improved in the course of a year, and that some others would be cured, but that our Lord would not heed the requests of some because He did not trust them.

When Lucy mentioned that the people would like to build a chapel there, our Lady answered:

*"Use half of the money received so far for the litters. On one of them, place a statue of Our Lady of the Rosary. The other half be set aside to help with the building of the chapel."*

Lucy then confided to her Mother, and told how she was accused of being a swindler and that people were muttering about having her hanged or burned. She begged for a miracle so that all would believe.

*"Yes, in October, I will perform a miracle so that all may believe."*

Childlike, Lucy did not want to forget any requests, so she told our Lady that she had been given two letters to give her and a bottle of cologne.

*"None of that is necessary for Heaven,"* said our Lady indulgently.

As our Lady began to leave, Lucy told the people to look toward the east if they wanted to see our Lady. They did in fact see the luminous globe gliding majestically toward the east until it finally ascended toward heaven and was lost to view.

Among others present, were about thirty seminarians and five or six priests, Monsignor João Quaresma, Father Manuel da Silva, the Prior of Santa Catalina and others. They took a position of vantage on a little hill above the crowd, where the basilica now stands.

Monsignor Quaresma tells what happened:

"At midday a complete silence, save for a whisper of prayers, fell over the crowd. Suddenly there were shouts of rejoicing — praising our Lady. Arms pointed at something above. 'Look, don't you see?' 'Yes, now I see.' . . . There was not a cloud in the azure sky. I too raised my eyes and tried to scan the amplitude of the sky. . . . To my great astonishment I saw clearly and distinctly a luminous globe that moved from east toward the west, slowly and majestically gliding down across the distance. My friend also looked and had the good fortune to enjoy the same unexpected and enchanting apparition. Suddenly the globe with its extraordinary light vanished before our eyes. . . .

"What do you think of that globe?" I asked of my friend.

"That it was Our Lady," he replied without hesitation.

The usual signs of Mary's presence were noted this day: the air cooled, the sun was dimmed, and many colored patterns of brilliant hues were seen all around. Here in September was noticed a shower of shining petals falling down from the sky, which disappeared as soon as they touched anything. The same shower was noted the first time the bishop of the newly activated diocese of Leiria-Fatima visited the shrine.

The diocese of Leiria had been defunct for many years. The territory was administered by the patriarch of Lisbon, Cardinal Belo, who had threatened excommunication to anyone who spoke in favor of Fatima. Father Fonseca, S.J., one of the leading historians of Fatima, and now a professor in the Biblical Institute in Rome, points out that from the beginning the Holy See had a more open mind about Fatima than the local authorities. Maybe the Vicar of Christ saw the picture more clearly from his lofty eminence and wanted to take Fatima out of the jurisdiction of Cardinal Belo. At any rate, a canonical investigation had to be made, and for that a bishop was required. So the diocese of Leiria was re-established in January, 1918. In May, 1920, Don Jose Correia da Silva was named its bishop. In 1922, when he visited the Cova, the Queen of Apostles greeted her apostolic son with a miraculous shower of petals!

## CHAPTER XVIII . . . *The Miracle of Fatima,* *October 13, 1917*

"And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."

— *Apocalypse* 12:1

So far as we have been able to find out, the only other time God foretold that He would work a miracle at a certain time and place was when our Lord foretold His own Resurrection. Only twice, apparently, since He created man has God tied together miracle and prophecy.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the tension that steadily mounted in central Portugal between September 13 and October 13. Unbelievers sneered and declared that October 13 would be a great day of triumph for them, for then would be exposed the huge hoax that the Church was trying to put over!

The families of the children were greatly worried that these dire predictions would come true and that they themselves would be killed for permitting the children to talk so. They tried everything to make the children admit it was all a lie. But Lucy and Francisco and Jacinta stuck to their story. What is more, they had no anxiety whatever about it. "Our Lady *said* she would work a miracle, so that was all there was to it. Why all this nonsense?"

Lucy's mother begged her to go to confession on October 12, because she feared they would all be killed when our Lady failed to work a miracle. And she was sure the miracle would not happen. But Lucy refused to be panicked.

A Lisbon newspaper, *O Dia*, which was anything but friendly to the Church and to Fatima, had this to say about October 13:

"Nearby communities, towns and villages emptied of people. For days prior to the thirteenth, groups of pilgrims traveled towards Fatima. They came on foot, buskins on their brawny legs, food bags on their heads, across the pine groves, where the strawberries seem like drops of dew upon the verdure, along the sands where the windmills rotate. A slow and swaying gait swung the hemps of their garments from side to side and waved orange handkerchiefs upon which sat their black hats."

*O Seculo*, another Lisbon paper, takes up the story:

"About ten in the morning, the skies became overcast. Soon it had turned to rain. Sheets of rain, driven by the chilly fall wind, whipped the faces of the pilgrims, drenched the roads, and chilled the people to the bone. While some sought shelter under the trees, against the walls or in scattered houses, others continued to march with impressive endurance."

In spite of this vicious weather, which turned the countryside into a sea of mud, there were about seventy thousand people at the Cova. Nearly all of them had walked great distances, carrying their own food and sleeping on the ground.

The children finally managed to struggle through the crowd to their positions before the holm-oak. There was a priest nearby who had spent the night in the Cova. He was saying his breviary. When the children arrived, dressed in their First Communion clothes, he asked the time of the apparition. When told, "At noon," he took out his watch and said —

"Look, it is already noon. Our Lady never lies. Let us wait."

After a few minutes he took out his watch again.

"Noon is gone," he announced, "Everybody out of here! The whole thing is an illusion!"

Lucy, of course, would not leave, so the priest began pushing the three children away. Then the little girl announced:

"Whoever wants to go away may go. I'm not going. I'm on my own property. Our Lady said she was coming. She always came before, so she must be coming again."

At this moment she glanced toward the east and said:

"Jacinta, kneel down. I've seen the flash. Our Lady is coming!"

Maria Rosa was still skeptical, "Watch out, daughter! Don't let yourself be deceived!"

The rain had ceased; the people closed their umbrellas. They noticed a small white cloud over the holm-oak.

Lucy spoke to the Lady, "Who are you, Madam, and what do you want of me?"

*"I want to tell you to have them build a chapel here in my honor. I am the Lady of the Rosary. Let them continue to say the Rosary every day. The war is going to end, and the soldiers will soon return to their homes."*

"I have many favors to ask of you," said Lucy. "The cure of some of the sick people, the conversion of some sinners . . ."

*"Some yes, others no. They must mend their lives, ask pardon for their sins. Let them offend Our Lord God no more, for He is already much offended."*

To make sure that she was completely carrying out our Lady's wishes, Lucy asked,

"Do you want anything more of me?"

"No," came the answer, "*I desire nothing else.*"

Here our Lady opened her hands, and it seemed that the light which emerged from them went straight up to where the sun should be, but the light was brighter than any sunlight. Suddenly the clouds seemed to be rolled apart as if by a pair of giant arms, and the sun came out between them in a clear blue sky.

St. John in his Apocalypse, speaking of the Mother of God, says,

"And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1). At Fatima our Lady became literally "clothed with the sun." As Lucy has often said, she seemed to be *made of light*, not just a bright figure. In this last apparition, as in all the others, the air cooled and the sun became dim as the moon in the presence of our Lady, as if she took the sun's light and for the time being suppressed its heat to appear again on earth.

The three children saw our Lady open her hands, as she took

her leave of them, and the light emerging from her palms went straight up to the place of the sun. This was what stopped the rain and rolled back the clouds, making the sun appear in a cloudless sky, with the rain clouds still around the horizon. But the sun was dimmed, as it has been in the five previous apparitions, so that one could look straight at it without the slightest discomfort.

Now our Lady fulfilled her promise to reveal our Lord and St. Joseph to the children. We will let Lucy speak for herself.

"I saw St. Joseph and the Infant Jesus beside Our Lady. Then I saw Our Lord blessing the crowd. Next Our Lady showed herself, dressed like Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, but without a sword in her heart. Finally I saw her dressed in another way; I don't know how to say it, but I think it was like Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She was dressed in a white and blue mantle."

Jacinta and Francisco saw the vision of the Holy Family, but only Lucy saw the other two visions.

The first vision is taken to represent the joyful mysteries of the Rosary — the Holy Family in our Lord's childhood. Jacinta and Francisco saw only this, because they were soon taken to heaven, as our Lady promised, and did not have to suffer the toil and care of adult life.

Lucy saw the second vision, which showed our Lord as a Man dressed in red as our Divine Redeemer. Like St. Joseph in the first vision, He was seen only from the chest up. Our Lady stood beside Him, as she did beside the cross, as Our Lady of Sorrows, dressed in purple robes. Our Lord made the sign of the cross three times over the world, after the manner a bishop gives his blessing.

Finally in the third vision, our Lady appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel, glorious in heaven.

The crowd saw the sun's accompaniment to the visions: When Lucy cried out to the world, "Look at the sun!" she thought she was directing their gaze to the visions. Instead, they saw the fulfillment of prophecy, "The sun shall be darkened . . . and the powers of heaven shall be moved" (Isa. 13:10).

It is better simply to quote eyewitness accounts:

Maria de Capelinha said:

"The sun cast different colors, yellow, blue and white. It trembled constantly. It looked like a revolving ball of fire falling on the people."

Avelino de Almeida, writing for *O Seculo* on October 17, said:

" . . . a spectacle unique and incredible if one had not been a witness of it. . . . One can see the immense crowd turn toward the sun, which reveals itself free of the clouds in full moon. The great star of day makes one think of a silver plaque, and it is possible to look straight at it without the least discomfort. It does not burn, it does not blind. It might be like an eclipse. But now bursts forth a colossal clamor, and we hear the nearest spectators crying, 'Miracle, miracle! Marvel, marvel!'

"Before the astonished eyes of the people, whose attitude carries us back to biblical times and who, full of terror, heads uncovered, gaze into the blue of the sky, the sun has trembled, and the sun has made some brusque movements, unprecedented and outside of all cosmic laws — the sun has 'danced,' according to the typical expression of the peasants . . . an old man . . . turns toward the sun and recites the 'Credo' from beginning to end. . . . I see him afterward addressing those about him who have kept their hats on, begging them vehemently to uncover before so extraordinary a demonstration of the existence of God. Similar scenes are repeated in all places. . . ."

Dr. Carlos Mendes, president of the municipality of Torres Novas, had been present at the Cova on September 13. Having seen nothing, he decided it was all an illusion. His brother, home on leave from the war in France, tried to persuade him to go to the Cova on October 13. Carlos tried hard to discourage him, pointing out that he could spend his time much better with his girl friend, rather than following a lot of superstitious people. Finally, when the soldier insisted, Dr. Mendes went along with his brother, talking to himself. He describes the miracle in these words:

"The rain stopped; the clouds split up into tatters, thin transparent strips. The sun was seen as a crown of fire, empty in the middle. It went around itself and moved across the sky. It would be seen behind the clouds and in between them, rolling around and moving horizontally. Some cried, 'I believe!'; others, 'Forgive!' The crowd prayed in terror."

There was no gradual slackening of the rain or slow melting of the clouds — it happened all at once.

To prove there was no chance of mass hypnotism, Alfonso Lopez Vieira saw the event as it has been described from his house in San Pedro de Moel, some eight kilometers away from the Cova. Father Inacio Lourenco, who was a boy of nine at the time, saw the solar phenomenon from Alburita as he was coming out of school. Alburita is eighteen miles from the Cova, and the phenomenon was entirely unexpected.

Father Lourenco tells how an unbeliever, who spent the morning mocking the blockheads who had made the journey to Fatima just to stare at a girl, suddenly became paralyzed with fright, raised his hands toward heaven, fell on his knees in the mire, and cried out, "Nossa Senhora! ! Nossa Senhora! !"

People in Alburita flocked to the churches, and they also noticed how everything turned green, red, yellow, vermillion — the same as at the Cova.

Back at the Cova itself, the terror was indescribable. It looked like the sun was about to strike the earth, especially as the heat intensified as the sun apparently drew near. People cried out in terror,

"Ai Jesus, we are all going to die here."

Some turned to Mary for help, "Our Lady, save us!"

Nearly all the Catholics made acts of contrition. One lady was even confessing her sins out loud. Maybe she felt that as long as the end of the world had come, when "all hearts should be revealed" there was no use trying to hide anything.

Finally the sun returned to its place and soon began shining bright as usual. Although the crowd had been drenched to the skin but ten minutes before, many had been in the drenching

downpour all night and all morning, they suddenly found their clothes were perfectly dry! So our Mother rewarded her children who came to see her.

The crowd finally went back to their homes. Jacinta and Francisco were soon taken home by our Lady to heaven, as she had promised. Lucy was sent to the Dorothean Sisters' school in Porto by the new bishop of Leiria. He told her that she was never even to mention the visions to anybody and had her change her name, so that nobody would know her and ask about it. She was called "Maria das Dores" — "Mary of the Sorrows." Eventually she asked the good Dorothean nuns to accept her for the most menial tasks as a lay sister. She was then called simply "Sister Mary of the Sorrows" — "Irma Maria des Dores" or "Irma Dores." Nobody knew for years that she was one of the three seers.

When the investigations of the canonical commission made it plain that the visions were authentic, and when she received permission from our Lady in later private revelations to tell many things to the bishop that were unknown until then, Bishop da Silva told her to write her memoirs, revealing what could be told. All works on Fatima are mainly based on these memoirs, which, unfortunately have not yet been fully published. The third part of the July revelation was written by Lucy and given by her to her bishop, who sealed the envelope without reading it, placed the seal of the diocese of Leiria upon it, and then put it in the secret archives. The letter will be opened in 1960.

In 1948, Lucy answered the call to a higher life and joined the contemplative Carmelites at Coimbra, taking the name of Sister Lucy of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Leading a cloistered life, she has no communication with the world. But she remains a witness to the tremendous message of Fatima, as our Lady said she would.

Millions of people have made their way to the Cova da Iria. Marvelous cures by the hundreds have occurred there in the past thirty-two years. However, ninety-nine out of every hundred persons return home with the affliction they came to Fatima to be cured of. Some went to Fatima actually demanding relief, but

instead of returning home cursing God and our Lady for not being cured, they return home resigned to bear their cross. They even ask our Lady to cure someone who needs it more, rather than themselves.

The grace of Fatima is the grace of conversion. The miracles of conversions, though less spectacular to the world, are even greater, because in a conversion God's grace works on the free will of man. Mary came to bring about the reconciliation of the world to her Son through conversion, and the grace of conversion flows through Fatima like a great ocean. Cardinal Cerejeira and many other people were convinced of the truth of Fatima by seeing the large numbers of souls brought back to the sacraments.

## CHAPTER XIX . . . "The Virgin With the Heart of Gold," Beauraing, 1932

"Show thyself a mother —  
Us thy children own,  
Prevail with Him to hear us  
Who chose to be thy Son." — *Ave Maris Stella*

After the world-shaking events of Fatima, it might seem anti-climactic to tell the story of Beauraing and Banneux. There is no mighty miracle before scores of thousands, nothing is said about World War II that was only six years away, no message about world events was given. Maybe our Lady visited these two little Belgian towns because she wanted us to think of her as our mother. When we come home to mother, we want to get away from the hustle and noise of the marketplace, from the mighty surge of great events in the world. Home and mother stand for rest and peace. In the two villages of Belgium in 1932, our Lady announced herself to us as the "Virgin with the Heart of Gold" and the "Virgin of the Poor."

At Fatima she took over herself the role of the ancient Hebrew prophets — warning her people of the terrible punishment to come upon the world unless we returned to her Son. Without retracting anything at Beauraing and Banneux, she reminds that her supreme relation to us is the same as her supreme relation to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity — a mother.

Beauraing is a village of two thousand souls in the diocese of Namur, Belgium. The six hundred homes surround a hill, crowned with the ruins of a feudal castle. At the foot of the hill is a boarding school for girls conducted by the Sisters of Christian Doctrine. Between the school and the road is a small garden trimmed with

flowering shrubs. Near the school, the road is spanned by the arch of a railroad bridge. Here our Lady appeared to five children in 1932.

The Voisin and Degeimbres families were poor, hard-working simple people. They were perfectly normal and healthy, living ordinary lives like their neighbors. The children were looked upon as any other children until November 29, 1932.

On this day, Fernande and Albert Voisin with Andrée and Gilberte Degeimbre saw a white form moving near the arch of the bridge. In *The Message of Mary* (Montreal, 1948) the Brothers of Christian Schools tell the story:\*

"It was a young lady of ravishing beauty standing in a circle of light. Her white robes with many pleats, shone brightly, and with a brightness so soft that the eyes of the children were not dazzled. Her robe fell to her feet, hiding them and seeming to end in a cloud. The Lady wore no cincture, but a reflected bluish light crossed her from her left shoulder to her right foot. On her forehead luminous golden rays formed a twinkling diadem. During the vision, the Lady kept hands joined, but when about to depart she opened her arms in a gesture of farewell. At the end of the apparition of December 29th when she opened her arms she uncovered on her breast a heart of shining gold.

"Although deeply agitated and frightened, the children insisted on coming back the next day. The Lady again appeared to them, but this time in the garden of the school. On the third day she stationed herself under a hawthorn tree near the entrance gate of the school, and just off the road. In this latter spot Our Lady appeared to the children thirty times.

"For several days the vision was a short one, and Our Lady remained silent, in order to accustom the children to her presence and to overcome their timidity. Finally she spoke to them, told them to come back in the evening, and asked that a chapel for pilgrims be erected there. She told them that she was the Immaculate Virgin, the Mother of God, and urged them to pray often, to pray always.

\* Reprinted with permission of publisher.

"On the evening of December 8th, the sight of Our Lady plunged the children into a veritable ecstasy of joy, during which even the doctors who were present were unable to distract them.\* On December 29th, and during succeeding apparitions, Mary manifested to the children her Immaculate Heart. The final vision, on the 3rd of January, 1933, was a particularly impressive manifestation.

"The children took their usual places in front of the hawthorn tree. Suddenly they let out a great shout, vibrant and joyful, causing a shudder to run through the attending crowd. Along with the shouts of the children there was heard a low repeated moan — it was Fernande, who on this evening was not privileged to behold the apparition. When the cry had died out, a profound and absolute silence fell over the throng, and each one felt the nearness of a supernatural presence. Finally the children arose from their knees; the apparition was over.

"Surprised and heart-broken, Fernande refused to leave the place. When the other children left, she continued to pray. Suddenly a ball of fire appeared in the hawthorn tree, there was a loud crashing noise, and the Virgin stood before her. 'Do you love my Son?' asked the vision of the girl now overcome with joy. With a sob, Fernande answered, 'O yes.' 'Do you also love me?' the Virgin asked. The girl again answered 'Yes.' And the Lady said, 'Then you must sacrifice yourself for me.'

"To three of the children, the Holy Virgin gave each a secret, but to Gilberte Voisin she made a great promise which truly must be regarded as the richest "message" of Beauraing: "*I will convert sinners.*"

As invariably happens in these cases, the children's story was greeted with skepticism and persecution. After many attempts to trap them in contradictions, the bishop was finally petitioned to

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\* Dr. Maistriaux of Beauraing testified before the medical commission that he pinched the children and even held the flame of a match on the hands of the children during the vision with no effect. The flesh was not even burned, whereas under hypnosis, though the person may feel no pain, the flesh is burned. When the children came out of their ecstasy they cried with pain when pinched again.

appoint a commission. Bishop Heylan did so. Finally, in 1943, Bishop Charue, his successor, received from the Holy Office in Rome the decree, "given after a favorable report by His Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines, and approved by His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, dated December 7, 1942, on the very inauguration of a Jubilee Year in honor of our Lady in the diocese of Namur."

On the following week, Bishop Charue mounted his episcopal throne in the parish church at Beauraing and announced official recognition of the devotion to Our Lady of Beauraing, commonly called the "Virgin of the Heart of Gold."

As at Lourdes, almighty God put His seal upon Beauraing by working miracles there. Bishop Charue issued the following decree in July, 1949:\*

"Having seen the reports of the canonical Commission appointed by us for the study of the cures of Miss Van Laer of Turnhout (in religion, Sister Prudentia of the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Holy Family) and of Mrs. Acar, nee Marie-Madeleine Group, of St. Nicholas (Waes), in which are contained numerous testimonies judged worthy of belief, as well as some conclusions of medical experts having been able freely and separately to express their opinions about the nature of the said cures;

"Having considered that these attestations where the value and the authority of the reasons are indisputable, prove, with the evidence, that Miss Van Laer and Mrs. Acar suffered from extremely grave diseases and that they had been cured instantly, perfectly, and absolutely beyond curative power in the case at issue to account for these sudden unexpected changes:

"Whereas, it has therefore been demonstrated that these cures assume the nature of supernatural matters:

"We acknowledge

"1. that Miss Marie Van Laer who for sixteen years suffered from a serious disease, deemed incurable, of a tubercular nature,

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\* Reported in *Fatima Findings*, May, 1950, reprinted by permission of the publisher.

or more probably staphylococcic, in the region of the cervical vertebra and in the right leg, which had progressed to the final stage, has been immediately and absolutely cured on the twenty-fourth of June, 1933, on the day after a pilgrimage made to Beauraing for the purpose of obtaining a cure;

"2. that Mrs. Acar-Group suffered from a myoma of the matrix, duly diagnosed by the attending physician, and found herself cured immediately and absolutely on July 30, 1933, on returning home from a pilgrimage made with the purpose of obtaining a cure.

"Consequently, using our power as Ordinary and taking into consideration the accounts and verdicts already sent us by the diocesan Commission charged with canonical inquiry;

"Having invoked the Holy Name of God;

"We have judged and do judge, we have declared and do declare that the cures of Miss Van Laer and Mrs. Acar-Group are miraculous and that, in view of the circumstances in which they have taken place, they ought to be attributed to a special intervention of God through the intercession of Our Lady of Beauraing.

"And let our present judgment and our declaration be made public for the honor of God, the glory of Our Lady, and the edification of the faithful.

"Given at Namur, this second day of July, 1949, on the feast of the Visitation of Our Lady.

ANDRE-MARIE  
Bishop of Namur  
by the order of;  
F. Toussaint, Prosecretary."

## CHAPTER XX . . . "The Virgin of the Poor," Banneux, 1933

"the blind see, the lame walk . . . and the poor have the gospel preached to them." — Mt. 11:5

In the early days of January, 1933, the Catholics of Belgium were asked to join in a novena of our Lady, asking her for a sign of confirmation of the apparitions reported at Beauraing. Discussion pro and con was running strong about the apparitions that had ended January 3 of that year.

Banneux is a little village thirteen miles east of Liege, sheltering three or four hundred people. Hard work and poverty are the lot of their existence. The grinding struggle for mere existence was so hard that even religion suffered the same fate as everything else. People thought God had forgotten them, and they had almost forgotten Him. In August, 1914, fires and shells laid waste the surrounding region. A group of Banneux citizens made a vow that if the village were spared the wreckage of war, they would consecrate it to our Lady. The prayer was heard, and from then on the official name was "Banneux, Notre Dame."

The Beco-Wegimont family were among the poorest of the poor — the parents and their seven children. Mariette, the oldest, shared with her mother the task of caring for the six smaller ones. Her constant, pressing work hardly inclined her to become a visionary or a dreamer. She had to be absent from school and catechism so much that she had not made her first Holy Communion, although she was twelve.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools go on with the story:

"On Sunday, January 15th, about 7:00 P.M. Mariette was looking out the kitchen window, trying to catch sight of her brother

Julian. It was past supper time, and the boy had been out since noon. It was dark that evening, no moon and only a few dim stars.

"Mariette was alone in the kitchen; her father had gone upstairs, and her mother was in an adjoining room putting the youngest children to bed. Suddenly Mariette cried out, 'Mamma, there is a lady in the garden!'

"She was looking at a young woman standing motionless a few inches above the ground, her head crowned with rays of light, her hands joined lightly together, smiling and very beautiful.

"Mariette was at first quite frightened, then fearful that it was an illusion, took up a kerosene lamp and went into the room where her mother was. Her mother saw nothing, and said mockingly: 'You're probably seeing ghosts.' But the girl called attention to the blue cincture of the Lady, and told her mother that she thought it was the Most Blessed Virgin. At that moment all fear left her; she took out her rosary and recited six decades, her gaze meanwhile fixed on the vision. After ten minutes she saw the lips of the Lady begin to move and she made a sign for Mariette to come to her. But the girl's mother forced her back, crying out that 'this was a dangerous farce.' When finally Mariette got back to the window, the Lady was gone.

"On Wednesday, the 18th, at about the same hour, Mariette felt forcibly drawn out of the house. She went outside, her father following her out of curiosity. He saw her fall on her knees, heeding neither the dark nor the cold. Then Mariette extended her arms, for she saw again, and in the same place as Sunday, the beautiful apparition. After a long contemplation, she rose and went forward, the Lady having made her a sign to follow her. Twice more Mariette knelt when the vision stopped. They had gone about a hundred yards when the Virgin turned toward the woods, the girl again following. When they had gone a few yards into the forest, Mariette suddenly knelt and plunged her hands into a small stream of water and repeated mechanically these words which she heard the Lady speak: *'This spring is reserved for me.'*

"The next day, during the vision, the Lady said to Mariette: *'I am the Virgin of the Poor.'* Then she led the girl, as on the

preceding evening and with the same stops, to the spring, and when Mariette asked what she meant by her expression: 'This spring is reserved for me,' Our Lady answered with a sweet smile: 'For all people.' She paused a minute, then added: 'For the sick. I have come to console and heal the sick.'

"On the 20th of January, during a short apparition in the garden, Mariette asked: "What is it that you want, O beautiful Lady." The Holy Virgin answered: 'I would like to have a small chapel erected here.'" Then she laid her hands on the girl's head and blessed her.

"The following day, Mariette went again to pray in the garden, but the hoped-for vision did not come. The absence of the apparition was prolonged through three long weeks, but all during that time, the girl went each evening to the blessed spot to recite her rosary. There were evenings when the cold reached 10 and 15 degrees below zero;\* there were snow storms and beating rains. But nothing could stop the child who braved the rigors of the weather to recite the rosary, four, five and even six times, and always with ardent fervor.

"Finally, on Saturday, February 11th,† her perseverance was rewarded: the Lady appeared again, conducted her to the spring and told her: 'I have come to bring solace to those who suffer.'

"On the 15th, the sixth apparition took place. 'Holy Virgin,' said the girl, 'The Chaplain has asked that you give me a sign.' The Lady answered: 'I believe in you. You must believe in me. I want you to pray often.' Then she confided a secret to the girl, and told her to guard it even from her parents. At the end of this apparition, Mariette wept for a long time.

"The final appearance of Mary at Banneux took place on Thursday, March 2, 1933. The rain had fallen all through the afternoon. At seven o'clock, after a violent gust of wind had blown across the field, the Blessed Mother appeared, just as Mariette had reached the third decade of the third rosary. Mariette was capti-

\* Probably centigrade.

† The seventy-fifth anniversary of our Lady's visit to St. Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes.

vated by the loving smile of our Lady, who said, *'I am the Mother of the Saviour, the Mother of God. I want you to pray often.'* This was precisely the title that the parish priest wanted to hear from the lips of the strange Lady his little parishioner claimed to see. After Mary had blessed Mariette, she bade her farewell. Knowing that this vision was the last, the girl was prostrated and sorrowful for a long time.\*

It is noteworthy that the title "Virgin of the Poor" has never been used in the liturgy, but is most appropriate for that poor land around Banneux where the soil gives such scant food that the people almost always have their faces turned away from heaven and are bent over the ground trying to grub out a living.

The Virgin of Poor, like her divine Son, thinks first of those who are ill in body: "I have come to console and cure the sick." "I have come to give solace to the suffering."

This is an apparition in which penance or the conversion of sinners is not mentioned directly, although it is implied in the request, "You must pray often." Mary knew that if she healed men's bodies, the healing of their souls would follow, as in fact it did.

The Virgin of the Poor was soon given her chapel — a small beautifully simple rustic church with stained glass windows picturing the apparitions. It was blessed on the feast of the Assumption that very year, August 15, 1933. Countless cures have been reported, probably the most notable is that admitted even by Herbert Thurston, S.J.,† whose "scientific skepticism" carried him, at times, to extremes.

Benito Peleri Garcia (36) of Barcelona, said to be an anarchist, was married to a Belgian wife. A boiler explosion in November, 1931, injured his right arm so badly that he could work no more. Medical treatment in Spain, Italy, and Germany helped him none, and they were barely existing on their small pension. In 1933

\* From *Message of Mary* by Brothers of the Christian Schools, Montreal, 1949, pp. 103-108. Used by permission of the publisher.

† "Beauraing and Other Apparitions," by Herbert Thurston, S.J. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1934), pp. 38-40.

his pious wife heard what was happening at Banneux, only a few miles from Dolhain, her home. She and their thirteen-year-old daughter finally persuaded the man to make a pilgrimage to the "Virgin of the Poor."

Though Benito Garcia claimed to be an unbeliever, he pledged himself to abstain from tobacco and wine on his pilgrimage, which they made on foot, as in the Ages of Faith. Setting out on July 4, 1933, from Barcelona, they climbed the Pyrenees, endured all that exposure could make them suffer. They begged their way, sleeping in the fields. After the long day's journey, Senora Garcia would knit little things and sell them to passers-by to keep them on their way. Her hardest task was to persuade Benito to continue.

"If I am not cured," he cried out one time, "you are making a fool of me. I will dump you down there for good in the country you come from."

They got within half a mile of Banneux and the anarchist bolted.

"You see I am not a scrap better," he said, and slipped off to Verviers, where he managed to strike another anarchist for a hundred francs.

His more than patient wife, with the aid of the police, managed to find him and convince him he could not hope to be cured before he had bathed in the water. So he finally took his place in the cue of pilgrims.

To his amazement, he at first thought the water was boiling hot. Only when he put in the other hand did he realize it was cool. A non-Catholic doctor present warned him that dipping his arm in a common pool was running a great danger of infection, so he obtained a fresh bucket from the spring. Benito finally consented to make the appeal.

"If you are the Virgin of the Poor, prove it. Here is a poor man who came all the way from Spain."

Feeling relief, according to the testimony of those present, he pulled out the drain tube and the wound healed immediately before their eyes. The details are set forth in "La Libre Belgique" (August 24, 1933).

As an example of the way a sound mind is in a sound body,

Garcia went away proclaiming the glories of the "Virgin of the Poor" and facing down his anticlerical associates. His good right arm probably struck many a blow against the reds in the Spanish Civil War three years later.

As at Beauraing, the Friends of Banneux acquired a neglected castle, made it over into a hospital and called it the "Home of Our Lady of the Poor." Sick pilgrims from all over the world are housed in "Our Lady's Home," and in addition to a great basilica, more infirmaries and hospitals and many other activities to glorify Mary. The Marian library at Banneux has already gathered a large collection of books on Mary in a score of languages.

The cure of Garcia on that day in August, 1933, was proclaimed a miracle by everybody present — everybody except the Church. The Bishop of Liege appointed a canonical commission which examined the historical, medical, chemical, theological, and all other aspects of the whole case. Finally, in 1942, under authority of the Holy Office, he declared devotion to Our Lady of Banneux "officially recognized." He added:

"From now on, it is more than a simple tolerance that we must grant this devotion, it is a full and entire authorization to practice it freely in this diocese. We are happy to be able to testify publicly this devotion, already nourished here for many years, to the Virgin of the Poor."

On December 8, 1943, to the International Union of Prayer the Bishop added these stirring words:

"... And in the same manner that she conducted her privileged messenger, Mariette Beco-Wegimont, through the cold and dark night toward the spring of water, a symbol of teaching them to submit to the peaceful sceptre of her Son, King of all nations and Prince of Peace."

It is interesting to note that in the German offensive in the "Battle of the Bulge" in December, 1944, the panzers penetrated west to the edge of Beauraing and north to the outskirts of Banneux. Also in spite of the fact that the destructive tide of war swept over the country four times, with the invaders destroying and the retreating armies likewise burning and blowing up everything to

prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy, and although all the surrounding towns were badly damaged and many of their people killed, the people and buildings in Banneux were practically untouched!

In his pastoral letter of October, 1949, the present bishop of Liege expressed the thought that is being repeated more and more in the Church in the past five years: "This is the Age of Mary."

"Henceforth we shall celebrate each year on the 22nd of August the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

"His Holiness Pius XII established this feast on May 4, 1949 to perpetuate the memory of this historic act which he performed on August 22, 1942 in consecrating the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

"By that consecration Pius XII officially opened what has been called the "Age of Mary," the era of the reign of The Blessed Virgin....

"... In this kingdom, my dear people, we cannot separate the Son from the Mother. Standing beside the Messianic King the Psalmist greeted in advance the Queen standing at His right hand (Psalm 44). As she was associated in the Passion of the Saviour, so too Mary took part in His triumph. We proclaim her Queen of Heaven and Earth, Queen of Angels and Saints. In the regenerate world, at the head of the new humanity redeemed by the blood of Christ, the Co-Redemptrix has her throne at the side of the Redeemer and no one is excluded from the beneficent activity of her whom God has willed to constitute Mediatrix and Dispensatrix of all graces. And besides, is not the place of the Mother of God at the very apex of the created world?

"That is why we speak of the reign of Mary, of the reign of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as we speak of the reign of Christ, of the reign of the Sacred Heart. In the consecration of the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus we recognize an act of homage to the royalty of Christ. Likewise in the consecration of this same world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Queen of the World. It is not without reason that the Church associates so

closely this feast of the Immaculate Heart with the pre-eminently triumphal solemnity of the Assumption. . . .

"Do you recall, my dear people, that last year at Banneux we laid the cornerstone of a sanctuary in honor of the Most Blessed Virgin? This sanctuary is the natural result of the recognition of the cult of Our Lady of Banneux. Such a frequented place of pilgrimage calls for an appropriate church to receive the pilgrims.

"In dedicating it to Our Lady of the Poor, Queen of the Nations, we have reference to the words of Mary, 'I am the Virgin of the Poor,' 'this spring is for all the nations for the sick.' We wish thereby to show that we truly believe that Our Lady appeared and spoke at Banneux. This conviction carries with it obligations for us.

"On two occasions, first in 1942, then in 1947, we officially recognized, with some reserves, the authenticity of the apparitions of Banneux. Today, after two more years of prayer and observation, we believe that we can and must in conscience recognize this authenticity without reserve — the authenticity, that is, of the eight apparitions of Our Lady to Mariette Beco which took place on January 15, 18, 19 and 20, on February 11, 15, and 20 and on March 2, 1933.

"In dedicating the future sanctuary to the Queen of the Nations, we wish to comply with both the message and the desire of our illustrious Visitor, to pay homage to her Royalty, and to emphasize the connections between her visit and the consecration of the world to her Immaculate Heart. Besides, do we not serve the interests of all peoples, so justly concerned for their future and for their security, by directing their gaze and their hearts towards her who is Queen of the Nations and Queen of Peace?"

Louis Joseph  
*Bishop of Liege*

Liege, August 22, 1949

## CHAPTER XXI . . . *Mary vs. Lucifer*

That is the story of the public visits made by God's Mother to her children on earth from 1531 until the present. Besides these, there have undoubtedly been a number of private apparitions to individuals, but they concerned only individuals.

Why write a book about the visits of our Lady in the past three hundred years? The answer was given seven centuries ago by St. Thomas Aquinas: "An apparition does not bring a new doctrine, but a new grace."

If there was ever a time when such a grace is needed, it is now. Trembling in the searing dawn of the atomic age, when any day might see a chain reaction of the basic energy of the universe which would change this planet into a flaming sun, humanity is searching frantically for peace and security. Thinkers everywhere are asking, "What brought all this about? What does all this mean? How did we come to this pass? And where are we going?"

He who made the world in the beginning, and then became Man and died to redeem the world, certainly would not let erring humanity go down to destruction in these modern days without spelling out for mankind the eternal facts of life — about heaven and hell, about sin and its punishment, both here and hereafter. So He sent His own Mother, and she spelled it out for us. Now, at least, no one can say he has not been told.

In our Lady's visits there are two general themes — to console us, her children, and to warn us. In both she urges us along the road to heaven and warns of the road to hell by encouraging prayer and penance.

Usually Mary had a special message for some chosen soul that concerned that soul alone. Her message at Paris in 1830, at La Salette in 1846, at Lourdes in 1858, and at Fatima in 1917 was

for the whole world — “come back to my Son through prayer and penance. Pray for sinners and make sacrifices or many will go to hell.”

“At La Salette, Our Lady is . . . telling us how we have sinned and describing how we will be punished if we continue to sin. And she is pleading with us to abandon our sins, and, as she pleads, she weeps. The Mother of God enthroned high above the archangels and saints, sits and weeps before two peasant children because of our sins.”\*

Lourdes marked the climax of Mary’s visits to France. She urged all to pray and do penance. She has rewarded the thousands who went to her by curing their ills, both of soul and body.

When our Lady appeared at Pontmain, she urged her children to pray more: “*but pray, my children*” — as if to say, “you are not praying as you must.”

Lucifer succeeds best in devouring souls and dragging them down with him into hell when people think he does not exist. And he has had some success already — there are millions who claim that there is no devil, and act as though there were no place of eternal punishment for the wicked. The father of lies covers his tracks quite well, but occasionally the cloven hoof betrays itself. Sometimes even he gets careless and indulges in very natural impulses to gloat over his victims, especially when it seems certain that those victims will never survive to tell the tale to the free world.

Selfish and shortsighted as we are, we spend more thought on being saved from bombing than on being saved from everlasting damnation. But our Lord makes us realize that “peace in our time depends on obeying Him.” He sends His mother to tell us, “*If my words are heeded (asking for prayer and return to God) Russia will be converted and there will be peace, if not she will spread her errors throughout the world, promoting wars and persecutions of the Church and the Holy Father, various nations will be annihilated.*”†

\* *The Sun Her Mantle*, pp. 215, 216.

† Fatima, July 13, 1917.

In 1939 Lucy became gravely ill. In a private apparition, our Lady gave Lucy permission to write the third part of the Fatima message. This is known only to Lucy — the message was sealed unread by her bishop and is now in the custody of the new bishop of Leiria. Providence will reveal the message when the right moment comes.

One thing is certain about the shape of things to come — it is impossible to exaggerate. When a pope writes on a subject, he usually reduces his statement to the lowest denominator. It is not the way of the Vicar of Christ to indulge in wild statements which would ill befit his supreme responsibility. But the late Pope Pius XII said this about the present times: "The human race today is involved in a supreme crisis, which will end in its salvation by Christ, or its dire destruction" (*Evangelii Praecones*, 1951).

Perhaps no one has sounded the depths of Communism better than Whittaker Chambers. Although not a Catholic, he went from Christianity to Communism and back to Christianity. Only by traveling this route can one really appreciate the inner meaning of Marxism.

The problem is this: how can a system which is hell on earth have captured the allegiance of one third of the human race in forty years? Before 1917 the Communists were simply a handful of plotters in basements, on the run from the police and living from hand to mouth. Suddenly, after the warnings of our Lady at Fatima in the summer of 1917, Lenin & Co. spread their doctrine like wildfire. It is easy to see how fatuous people, like some rich men in America, could be duped by the sophistries of Marxism. But how the worst reign of terror in the world's history could keep its hold on the people for forty years, and keep spreading all over the world, is the real mystery. Catholics can explain it with the supposition that God has given Lucifer more liberty to spread his errors throughout the world, but simply from the point of view of an objective historian the problem would seem beyond solution. Objectively, Chambers has come closer than anybody to explain the strange spell of Marxism.

He points out that, for the first time in the history of the

world, we have a system of life designed to eliminate any idea of God from the hearts of men. The Roman emperors put the early Christians to death because they considered them impious, not worshiping the gods recognized by the state. They were sentenced in the name of religion. In all history, where men and women died for their faith they were killed by those who had a different faith. But Communism is a faith in Man as against God. Communism poses the ultimate question, God or Man?

The whole thing is so simple and so flattering to man's ego, and it eliminates so many moral restrictions that hinder one in the mad pursuit of happiness. Karl Marx had a simple formula: "Philosophers have explained the world; it is necessary to change the world." This is the bright vision of a new world, made to man's liking, that has caught the minds of men of all classes in all countries, in defiance of religion, morality, honor, and everything we once held dear and sacred.

Here is a startling confirmation of the reign of Antichrist described in St. Paul:

"Let no one deceive you in any way, for the day of the Lord [His second coming at the end of the world] will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and is exalted above all that is called God, or that is worshipped, so that he sits in the temple of God and gives himself out as if he were God."\*

Whether or not these are the "latter times" spoken of by de Montfort, we cannot say. We are certainly in a "supreme crisis" as our late Holy Father put it, and as each month passes we realize the truth of his statement that the destruction of mankind hangs in the balance. It was indeed the work of Divine Providence to raise up a Pope who was such a champion of our Lady. We must become servants of Mary or slaves of a diabolical state whose every breath carries the searing brimstone of hell.

This is the choice for us to make: Mary or Lucifer. Satan has made inroads in the world in the last generation such as never before since time began. The most savage cannibals never dreamed

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\* 2 Thess. 2:3, 4.

of extermination camps, where men and women would be murdered not by thousands or tens of thousands but by millions. And Hitler with all his efficiency and ruthlessness could not come close to the red terror. The red rule of the militant godless is expanding, with the help of the fierce fires of hell, throughout the world with terrifying speed, like the mushroom cloud of an atomic explosion.

Since 1830, the great adversary of Lucifer has been preparing her children for this supreme crisis. In 1917 at Fatima she solemnly warned us, "*heed my words or Russia will spread her errors throughout the world.*" She has used every means to bring us back to her loving arms — she has pleaded, she has exhorted, she has wept, she is constantly working miracles of healing and conversion: "*Turn back to my Son and fall on your knees in prayer before it is too late.*"

## Appendix

The two events that follow have only indirect bearing on our story, and have not received official approbation from the Holy See. But our story would be incomplete without them. Besides Robinsonville and Pellevoisin bear the same general characteristics that distinguish visits of our Lady that have been recognized by the Holy See as worthy of our belief — Lourdes and Fatima. Our late Holy Father Pius XII often referred to the remarkable events that have accompanied the Pilgrim Virgin in her tours of the world.

The position of the Holy See in regard to Fatima is made clear in the following Apostolic Letter creating the shrine a minor basilica:

“ . . . By a light from above shining on a dark world, the august edifice of Fatima, in Portugal, is sacred to the Blessed Virgin Mary, where the same Mother of God, called under the title of the rosary, *once presented herself to be seen.*\* The edifice excites admiration because of its size and beauty . . . especially in the same edifice . . . are placed in a sepulcher the bodies of Francis and Jacinta Marto, *who were deemed worthy of a marvelous vision of the Mother of God.*\* But most of all it is brought to our notice that the Temple is notable for being frequented by the faithful, because crowds of suppliants come from almost all parts of the world, that they may weave a crown of petitions and most beautiful praise to the Mother of God.”

Given at Castel Gandolfo, under the ring of the Fisherman, on the twelfth day of the month of November in the year 1954, the sixteenth of Our Pontificate.

Guadalupe, Mexico, La Salette, and Lourdes have also been created minor basilicas. Many other churches have been created minor basilicas, but for different reasons. The primary reasons for so honoring the above churches are the reports of apparitions there.

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\* Author's italics.

## I. Robinsonville, Wisconsin, 1859

*"... teach them their catechism, that they may know and love my Son; otherwise the people here will lose their faith."*

— OUR LADY TO ADELE BRISSE

The 1850's saw a steady stream of Belgian immigrants into the region of Green Bay, Wisconsin. There was no active war on religion in the frontier — it was simply losing by default. The children not only did not learn about God — they didn't learn anything. The struggle to establish homesteads and wrest a living from the wilderness was so hard that the children received no schooling at all.

Because the instruction of the children was almost entirely neglected, the little ones grew up like animals. Faith and morals in the rising generation became steadily worse. One priest would have such a vast territory that he was barely able to say Mass and administer the sacraments. The preparation had to be left to others, and it was usually neglected.

Lambert and Katherine Brisse and their daughters Adele, Esperance, and Isabelle were pious, God-fearing people. Adele, the eldest, had hoped to enter the convent. She consulted her confessor before they left Belgium whether she should devote herself to the service of God in the foreign mission field. Her parents insisted that she accompany them to America.

"Go with your parents," the confessor told her, "God will reward you for your obedience. If He wills, you can become a sister in America. I will pray for you."

Three events acted as prelude for the drama that was enacted in Green Bay: In 1846 the Sixth Provincial council at Baltimore proclaimed Mary Immaculate patroness of the Church in America; in Rome Pope Pius IX in 1854 defined the Immaculate Conception of Mary as an article of faith; and in February of 1858, our Lady

appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous in Lourdes and announced, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The autumn of 1859, Adele Brisse was trudging down an Indian trail with a sack of wheat on her head. She was suddenly aroused by the vision of a lady in white standing between two trees. Adele was so frightened she was unable to move. Slowly the vision vanished, and Adele continued on her way to the small grist mill at Dykesville. When she told what had happened to her parents, they thought it was a departed soul in need of prayer.

On the following Sunday, Adele was on her way to church with her sister Isabelle and Mrs. Vander Miessen. When they came to the place she stopped suddenly, with her eyes riveted on the spot between the trees.

"Oh, that Lady is there again," she said as a reproach. After a few minutes, the Lady disappeared as before.

Very much troubled, Adele confided the whole matter to her confessor, Father William Verhoeff. He told her not to be disturbed but if she saw the vision again to ask it in God's name who it was and what it desired of her. A man who was working with the Holy Cross Fathers accompanied her home.

When they neared the spot, Adele again saw a Lady clothed in dazzling white with a yellow sash around her waist. A crown of stars circled her head, and her long, golden, wavy hair fell loosely over her shoulders; such a bright heavenly light shone around her that Adele could hardly look at her sweet face.

Not frightened this time, Adele fell to her knees and spoke as the priest advised her:

"In God's name, who are you and what do you desire of me?"

"I am the Queen of Heaven, who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same," came the answer.

"You were at Holy Communion this morning," continued the Lady.

"Yes, dear Lady," answered Adele.

"You have done well, but I wish you to do more. Pray for nine days. Go and make a general confession and offer your Com-

*munion for the conversion of sinners. If they do not convert themselves and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them."*

In the meantime, her companions, anxious to know to whom she was speaking, inquired, "Who is it, Adele? Is it a poor soul from Belgium, or who is it?"

"Kneel," said Adele. "The Lady says she is the Queen of Heaven."

"Oh, why are we so unhappy not to see her as you do?" wailed one of the women.

"*Blessed are they that believe and do not see,*" answered the Lady, looking kindly at her.

Then turning to Adele she said, "*What are you doing here in idleness, while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?*"

"What more can I do, dear Lady?" answered Adele, weeping.

"*Teach the children,*" replied the Lady.

"How shall I teach them who know so little myself?" pleaded Adele.

"*I do not mean science of the world: teach them their catechism, that they may know and love my Son; otherwise the people here will lose their Faith,*" replied the Lady.

"With God's grace, and with the help of your intercession, I promise, dear Lady, to be faithful to what you bid me," answered Adele.

"*Go and fear nothing. I will help you,*" replied the Lady.

Then our Lady, raising her eyes and hands heavenward, rose slowly upward, surrounded by a light, smokelike incense. She seemed to be asking a blessing on those who were kneeling at her feet. Adele then fell on her face in a faint. Her companions tried to soothe and revive her. The man went to a little creek, wet a cloth and brought her some water. As soon as she regained consciousness, they walked toward home, but as Adele was still weak, they rested at a farmhouse. The news astonished all. Most of the people believed it, but some thought she was demented.

How could Adele, a poor country girl, without any preparation,

assume the responsibility of the role placed upon her? This required strength and divine light from above, and Adele, as commanded, prepared her soul for the God-given work by nine days of fervent prayer and the reception of the sacraments. Then, faithful to her promise, and unwavering in her resolution, she set out in search of the little ones. Going from farmhouse to farmhouse, she gathered them lovingly around her and instructed them in all that is necessary for the First Holy Communion. She traveled many miles up and down the peninsula in all kinds of weather, admonishing the sinner and edifying, by the fervor of her spirit and the purity of her heart, all those with whom she came in contact.

In the meantime Adele's father, a skilled carpenter, erected a small log chapel by the hallowed spot of the apparitions.

For seven years Adele continued to travel from place to place carrying on her mission until the Reverend Philip Crud, believing it to be the Blessed Mother's desire that she start a community of Sisters who would continue her work after her death, advised Adele to build a home and to encourage young women to join her. Again Adele had recourse to prayer, and again she appealed to the people for assistance. They responded willingly and built a frame convent and school.

"It was during the episcopate of the most Reverend Joseph Melcher, D.D. (1868-1873) that Sister Adele met strong opposition on the part of the clergy who believed her story a myth. They also claimed that there were certain abuses during processions. Whether there really were abuses cannot be determined at this distance. In any case, the sisters themselves were blameless. But certain priests reported unfavorably to the bishop. Bishop Melcher, who had little or no opportunity to know Sister Adele and her work . . . at once laid an interdict on the Chapel. Adele, sharing the fate of Jeanne d'arc, was refused the Sacraments and threatened with excommunication if she persisted in telling her story of the Apparitions.\*

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\* "Our Lady of Good Help," by Sisters of St. Francis, Bay Settlement, Green Bay, Wis., 1950, p. 18, booklet.

"The Bishop wrote to Sister Adele commanding her to dismiss the children, lock the school and chapel, and bring him the keys.

"She did as she was commanded, but before she surrendered the keys she purchased an acre of land near the chapel on which to build a home and still go on instructing God's little ones. This accomplished, she brought the keys to the Bishop. Sister Adele, so humble and submissive at other times, could be stern when opposition rose to thwart her in her endeavors. She informed the Bishop that he would be responsible for every soul lost due to lack of religious instruction, and that she would continue to instruct the children as she had been commanded to do. The bishop was so impressed by her sincerity and conviction that he returned the keys. He told her to continue with her teaching. . . .

"In 1885, when Sister Adele's building project was completed and when her work was meeting with gratifying results a strange heresy began to take root in the Peninsula. Joseph Rene Vilatte, a bishop of an heretical sect, established himself in the center of a Catholic community. Due to unfortunate wrangles between the clergy and the laity, the Peninsula had become a fertile field for the dissemination of false doctrines. Joseph Vilatte cleverly used deplorable circumstances to mislead these simple unsuspecting people into his strange form of Catholicism.

" . . . After thirty years in the service of the Mother of God this faithful servant of Mary, amid the tears and the prayers of those whom she had led into the Faith and edified by her example, passed to her eternal reward. . . . Her last words were: "I rejoiced in what was said to me, 'We shall go into the house of the Lord.' "\*

In spite of schisms, heresies and other factors, the Belgian community of the settlement attribute their deep and loyal faith, which still is strong and growing today, to the devoted work of Sister Adele and her companions.

Many cures have been reported at the chapel, apparently quite beyond natural causes. No canonical investigation of the apparitions has been made, and none can be made now because all

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\* *Ibid.*

the witnesses are long dead. The shrine has not attracted such throngs of pilgrims that it was deemed advisable to set up a medical bureau to pronounce on cures. People receive answers to their prayers in every part of the world — answers which sometimes come in the form of cures and conversions. The Church sees no reason for excitement when God answers the prayers of His children. Certainly the whole story of our Lady's visit to our own land follows the pattern of other apparitions which have been approved by the Church, and it is quite in keeping with what we would expect from Mary, the Refuge of Sinners: "*Bring the little ones to my Son. Save them from losing their faith by teaching them their catechism.*"\*

## II. *Pellevoisin*

There are quiet little places almost unknown to the world that are probably very dear to Mary's heart because they are so much like the quiet life she spent in Nazareth.

There is even a question whether our Lady really appeared to Estelle Faguette at Pellevoisin, but there is no doubt about the scapular of the Mother of Mercy being strongly encouraged by the Holy See.

The name Pellevoisin comes from the Latin, *belli vicus* — "place of war" in memory of an ancient battle between the Gauls and the Romans. There is still a great mound there where a warrior and his men were buried on the field of battle. Today a statue of our Lady smiles down from the top of the mound.

There is only a narrow gauge railway, single track, leading to the outside world. No mountains, forests, or rivers — just peaceful farms mark this out-of-the-way section of Indre in the Archdiocese of Bourges.

\* Cf. "The Chapel, Our Lady of Good Help, a Wisconsin shrine of Mary," by the Sisters of St. Francis of Bay Settlement, Wis., 1948.

Estelle Faguette was born in 1843 near Chalons-sur-Marne of poor parents. They went to Paris in search of work, and Estelle was put under the care of the Sisters of Charity, who no doubt told her all about the Miraculous Medal devotion which was sweeping the country. She was enrolled as a Child of Mary. She entered as a novice with the Augustinian nuns at the Parish Hotel-Dieu (Hospital), but had to leave because of impaired health. The good Sisters of Charity secured employment for her with the Countess of Rochefoucauld, but her health gradually declined. She developed a large tumor and tuberculosis. Both lungs and the bone in her right arm were affected. The Paris doctors pronounced her case hopeless.

The Countess took her to her chateau near Pellevoisin, and gave her every care. In the chateau grounds there was a grotto with a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. Estelle refused to give up. Instead, she wrote this touching letter and had it placed at our Lady's feet in the grotto:

"My good Mother, here I am again at your feet. You cannot refuse to hear me. You have not forgotten that I am your daughter and that I love you. Through your Divine Son and for His glory restore the health to my poor body. Think of the distress of my parents. You know that they have only me to help them. Am I not going to be allowed to finish the work that I have started? If, because of my sins, you cannot completely cure me, you could at least give me a little strength so that I can earn my living and look after my parents. You see, my good Mother, they will soon have to beg for their food, and it hurts me terribly to think of that. Remember the sufferings you endured the night the Saviour was born, when you had to go from door to door pleading for shelter. Remember, too, what you suffered when Jesus was stretched on the Cross. I trust in you, my good Mother. If you wish it, your Son can heal me. He knows that I longed to be one of His brides, and that it was pleasing to Him that I sacrificed that life for the sake of my family who need me so greatly. Please listen to my entreaties and put them before your Divine Son. If it is His will, let Him give me back my health, but let His will, not mine, be

done. May He at least grant me complete resignation to His purpose and let that resignation bring both me and my parents to salvation. You possess my heart, Blessed Virgin. Keep it always and let it be the pledge of my love and of my gratitude to your maternal goodness. I promise, my good Mother, that, if you will grant me the favor I ask of you, I will do everything I can to glorify your Divine Son. Ensure, O Blessed Virgin, that I imitate you in your obedience and that one day I, with you, possess Jesus for all eternity."

The Countess had to return to Paris, so she moved Estelle to a little cottage near the parish church of Pellevoisin on January 20, 1876. She even paid for her grave before leaving, never expecting to see her again. Estelle asked the pastor, Abbé Salmon, to write the Countess begging her to light a candle for her in the church of Notre Dame des Victoires and another before the altar of Our Lady of Lourdes in another Church. They were lit on February 14. That night, according to the account written by Estelle later, the devil appeared to her in human shape by the bed. Almost at the same instant, our Lady appeared at the foot of the bed, clothed in white. On her breast was a piece of material of a slightly different shade of white. She said to the devil, "*What are you doing there? Don't you see that she is wearing my livery and that of my Son?*" At this the devil disappeared.

Then she said to Estelle, "*Fear nothing! You know very well that you are my daughter. Courage! Be patient. My Son consents to be moved. You will suffer another five days in honor of the Five Wounds of my Son. On Saturday you will either be dead or cured. If my son gives you back your life, I want you to spread my glory.*"

Estelle managed to say, "But what can I do? I'm of no importance. I don't know what I could do."

Then an image of square marble appeared to her, like the votive tablets on the walls of famous shrines. Estelle then asked, "But where shall I have it placed? At Notre Dame des Victoires in Paris or here in Pellevoisin?"

Our Lady answered, "*At Notre Dame des Victoires they have*

*ample testimony of my power, but at Pellevoisin they have nothing. They need something to stir them."*

Estelle promised to do all she could to spread Mary's glory. Our Lady answered, "Have courage! But you must keep your promise," and disappeared.

Estelle told Abbé Salmon of her heavenly visitor in the morning, and he, of course, dismissed it as the hallucination of a dying woman.

That night Estelle saw the devil again, but further off. Again our Lady came and said, "Don't be afraid, I am here. And my Son feels compassion, and He leaves you your life. You will be cured on Saturday."

Estelle said, "But if I could choose, I would sooner die for I am so well prepared." To which our Lady answered, "Don't be ungrateful. If my Son gives you back your life, it is because you need it. What has he given to men more precious than life? In restoring your life, do not think He has exempted you from suffering. No, you will suffer and not be free from difficulties. It is difficulties that give merit to life. If my Son has allowed Himself to be moved, it is because of your great resignation and patience. Do not lose their fruits by your own choice. Have I not told you that if He gives you back your life, you will broadcast my glory?"

After a pause our Lady said, "Now let us look at the past." Then in review Estelle saw every sin she had committed in her whole life, even the very slight ones. After this our Lady departed without saying anything.

Again Estelle told the Abbé in the morning, and again he discounted the story. But he did mention it to some of the nuns who were in attendance. This would become important later, because it showed that she had predicted her cure when all the doctors considered her case utterly hopeless.

That night the devil appeared again, but almost out of sight. Our Lady came again with the greeting, "Come have courage my child." Estelle was filled with remorse at the thought of all her sins, but our Lady reassured her, "All those things are over and done with. By your resignation you have made amends for

*your faults. I am all-merciful and govern my Son. My maternal heart has been touched by your good deeds and by the fervent prayers you have made to me—including the little letter you made to me in September. The words which touched me most were: 'Consider the distress of my parents if I fail them. They will have to beg their bread. Remember what you suffered when Jesus your Son, was stretched on the Cross.' I showed this letter to my Son. Your parents need you. Strive to be faithful in the future. Do not lose the graces given you and spread my glory."*

Estelle became so positive in her assertions that she would be cured on the following Saturday, that Abbé Salmon thought it prudent to have her repeat her story to three or four witnesses—just in case it was not hallucination—although he had no faith in it.

On the fourth night our Lady appeared again and spoke to Estelle as she had the night before, "Be brave, patient and resigned . . . I want you to spread abroad my glory."

On the fifth night there was no manifestation of the devil—for the first time. The marble votive tablet that had been present at all previous apparitions, now appeared with a golden rose in each corner and a golden heart in the upper half issuing flames, pierced by a sword and surrounded by a wreath of roses. Underneath were the words, "I invoked Mary in the depth of my misery. From her Son she obtained my complete cure. Estelle F." On this occasion, our Lady said, "If you wish to be my servant, you must be simple and see that your deeds correspond to your words. Salvation may be won in any state of life. You can do a great deal of good where you are, and you can spread abroad my glory. The things that affect me most are lack of respect for my Son in Holy Communion, and the prayerful attitude people assume when their minds are really on other things. I am saying this for the people who pretend to be devout. Yes, yes, spread my glory abroad, but before you speak of it you must wait for the advice of your confessor and spiritual director. There are snares ahead of you. People will consider you a visionary, a fanatic, a lunatic. Pay no attention. Be faithful to me. I will help you."

After our Lady left, a great spasm of pain shook Estelle. After a few moments it died away, and she felt she was cured.

Abbé Salmon came to see her at six-thirty the next morning. Estelle declared herself cured, but when she showed her arm it was still swollen. The father said he would return after saying Mass for her and bring her Holy Communion. If then she could make the sign of the cross, he would believe her. When directed to do so, she slowly and solemnly made the sign of the cross. The arm was no longer swollen and a dried-up scar had replaced the open wound. She repeated the sign of the cross before a group who had heard her predictions about being cured that day. Her tumor had completely vanished. A few hours later she got up and dressed. She breathed normally and ate and drank like anybody else. The cure was complete, instantaneous, and permanent — the three necessary conditions for a miracle. The doctors who examined her could find no possible natural explanation. And the cure came at the very time it had been predicted.

Nothing more happened until July 1, the eve of the feast of the Visitation, and also of the consecration of the Basilica at Lourdes. At about half past ten that night, in the room where our Lady had appeared before, Estelle became conscious of her presence. She was surrounded by a large oval of white, yellow, and red roses which gave forth an exquisite scent. Rays of light streamed from her hands, as in the vision of Catherine Laboure, and as would later appear to the children of Fatima. On her breast she wore a white scapular with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our Lady said that she had come "*especially for the conversion of sinners . . . through me, my Son touches the most hardened souls. His Heart has so much love for mine that He cannot refuse my requests.*" After the vision, Estelle declared, "When one has seen the Blessed Virgin, one wants to die to see her again."

Our Lady came again on the two following days. At the end of her visit on July 3, she said, "*I have come to end the feast.*" Estelle did not know what this meant and related it to her confessor. Abbé Salmon explained that that very day, two hundred and fifty miles to the south, two cardinals, thirty-six archbishops

and bishops and a vast throng of priests and people had climaxed a great celebration at Lourdes by crowning the statue of our Lady with a precious crown.

The Countess of Rochefoucauld now returned from Paris and Estelle resumed her former duties. She would occasionally visit the place where our Lady appeared. On September 9 in the afternoon, our Lady appeared to her just as she finished saying the rosary. She said, *"For a long time the treasury of my Son has been opened. Let people pray."* Then she lifted up the little patch of material Estelle had noticed in all of the earlier visits. It seemed to be a white cloth depicting the Sacred Heart from which emerged a cross surmounted with a crown of thorns. The Heart was pierced with a lance. Our Lady mentioned how her Son had shown St. Margaret Mary the devotion to His Sacred Heart and how He wanted the whole world to take up this practice. Holding up the scapular of the Sacred Heart, our Lady said to Estelle, *"I love this devotion. It is here that I will be honored."*

On September 15, our Lady's birthday, she appeared again to Estelle, in the same room. Besides telling her about things that concerned only herself personally, she said, *"And France, what have I not done for her? How many warnings, and yet she has refused to listen! I can no longer restrain my Son."* She appeared deeply moved as she said, *"France will suffer."* As Estelle described it later in her diary, *"She paid particular emphasis on these words. Then she paused once more and continued, 'Courage and confidence.' At that moment the thought occurred to me, if I say this it is likely that no one will believe me. The Blessed Virgin understood me, for she replied: 'I have arranged all beforehand. So much the worse for those who may not be willing to believe you. Later on they will recognize the truth of my words.'*"

On All Saints' Day, and five days later, our Lady again visited Estelle, and said, *"I have chosen you, for I choose the small and weak for my glory. Be brave. The time of your testing is about to begin."*

When Estelle was making some scapulars of the Sacred Heart on the afternoon of November 11, our Lady appeared and said,

*"You have not been wasting your time today. You have been working for me."* Then she added, *"Many more must be made."*

The last visit was on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8. Our Lady told Estelle to recall all that she had been told in the previous visits. As the various visits passed through her mind in detail, our Lady looked steadily at her. Then, holding up the scapular, she had Estelle kiss it. Then she said, *"You will go yourself to see the Prelate. You will present to him the model scapular you have made. Tell him he is to help you with all his power, and that nothing will be more acceptable to me than to see this livery on each of my children, and that they all endeavor to repair the outrages received by my Divine Son in the Sacrament of His Love. See the graces I will bestow on those who wear it with confidence, and who will assist you in propagating it."* As our Lady was speaking, she stretched forth her hands and from them fell an abundant rain, which seemed to Estelle to mean the graces of piety, salvation, conversion, health. Then our Lady added, *"These graces are from my Divine Son; I take them from His Heart; He can refuse me nothing."*

Word had come to the archbishop of Bourges about the events at Pellevoisin, and he had Estelle brought to him. After a two day cross-examination, he directed Abbé Salmon to have a number of scapulars made. He appointed a canonical commission of fifty-six priests to investigate the whole matter. Fifty-five reported favorably and one abstained from giving an opinion. Although the archbishop did not make a formal pronouncement, he referred the matter to the Congregation of Rites and the Holy Office in Rome. On this first anniversary of the apparitions, he blessed the chapel (originally Estelle's room), said Mass, and enthroned the new statue of Our Lady of Pellevoisin. He founded the confraternity of the Mother All-merciful. The Papal nuncio, Msgr. Chigi, was one of the first to join. Before he had time to take further steps, the archbishop died.

Although the archbishop was most favorable, his next two successors were friendly but distant. In 1897 the new archbishop, Msgr. Servonnet, ordered a canonical investigation and made Abbé

Salmon a canon, and encouraged the formation of other confraternities associated with that of Our Lady of Pellevoisin. But things changed again — Canon Salmon was banished to an obscure parish and the investigation was suddenly called off. An attack had been made on Estelle, claiming that she was pregnant, instead of having a tumor. An examination proved that she was still a virgin. Evidently even that report could not change the archbishop's opinion. Besides, the prefect of the "department" was violently anticlerical. He openly sneered, "France does not need two Lourdes," and perhaps the good prelate thought it prudent not to push the inquiry any further for fear it would ruin already bad relations with civil authorities. The archbishop closed the chapel. It remained closed until his death in 1909.

Estelle relates that our Lady told her to go higher if "the Prelate" did not approve. So she resolved to call on Leo XIII.

Taken to Rome by a duchess connected with the De Rochefoucauld family, Estelle had a private audience with the Holy Father. She showed him a scapular she had made and asked him to approve it as the only scapular of the Sacred Heart. He promised he would. A few months later the Congregation of Rites approved a scapular of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, carrying a representation of the Sacred Heart on one square and a picture of our Lady on the other, under the title of "Mother of Mercy." No mention was made of Pellevoisin, although the title "Mother of Mercy" would remind one of our Lady's words to Estelle, "*I am all-merciful.*" The decree speaks of St. Margaret Mary and encourages the practice of "wearing on the breast the image of the Sacred Heart in the form of a scapular."

In 1904, 1907, and 1926, the Holy See made it clear that approval of the scapular implied no recognition of any apparitions, revelations, or miraculous cures. The Holy Office even urged people not to discuss the apparitions, "in order that they may be forgotten."

On the other hand, nobody can explain away the cure of Estelle, which was recognized by all as utterly beyond the power of medicine.

The Holy See reviews the findings of the local diocesan commission, and is even more strict than the local bishop in demanding ironclad proof and in raising every possible objection. The Church is the enemy of the "false miracle" and will not recognize any apparition if the slightest possible doubt remains concerning the credibility of the witnesses. Apparently, the case either for or against Pellevoisin could not be firmly established in Rome. In 1907 Cardinal Merry del Val wrote to Cardinal Coullie of Lyons and to the Archbishop of Bourges that "neither directly nor indirectly had the Holy See approved (or disapproved) these apparitions."

It seems that the matter will rest there.

There is much that is very beautiful in the story of Pellevoisin, and the doctrine is certainly orthodox Catholic theology, as when our Lady said of her Son, "His Heart has so much love for mine that He cannot refuse my requests." It is most useful to realize what is brought home in the story of Pellevoisin, that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are inseparable. We are reminded of what St. Thomas Aquinas said about private revelations, that they are "not for the proclamation of a new doctrine in faith, but for the direction of human acts."

Pellevoisin is still a shrine of devotion to the "Mother All-Merciful." Today thirty Sisters of St. Dominic live there and sing God's praises. It is a quiet backwater of France where a few pilgrims go to meditate and pray in peace and quiet.

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